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B. H. LIDDELL HART;
Theorist for the 21st Century

by
LIEUTENANT COLONEL RICHARD M. SWAIN
U. S. ARMY



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ABSTRACT

This student monograph traces the early writings of B. H. Liddell Hart in order to establish a basis for evaluating his continuing relevance as a theorist of war. Particular attention is given to that dimension of war now called the operational level. The paper examines Liddell Hart's theoretical, historical, and reform-oriented essays through 1933 with primary emphasis given the first. The paper is not intended to be a biography and its scope is limited to theoretical adequacy.

The first section of the monograph addresses Liddell Hart's efforts to discover a more economical method of infantry attack, a tactical solution to the trench stalemate of the Western Front of World War I. These efforts led ultimately to the "Man-in-the-Dark" Theory of War and The "Expanding Torrent" System of Infantry Attack. The former was a conceptual description of combat based on the idea of two men fighting in a dark room. The latter was a system designed to collapse a defensive zone by the cumulative effect of multiple combats by units platoon-sized and larger. During this period Liddell Hart drew two conclusions which were to remain with him throughout his life. The first was the idea that all combat can be broken down into two components, guarding and hitting. The second was the idea that the fundamental law of war is the law of economy of force.

In 1922 Liddell Hart began his speculations about what was to be known as mechanized warfare. This was joined in 1924 with inquiry into the nature of war itself. These two streams of thought, formed by ideas drawn from historical research and the observations of a working journalist, merged into what has become known as the theory of the Indirect approach. The second and third section of the monograph trace the evolution of these ideas and examine the epistemology of Liddell Hart's theories.

The study concludes that Liddell Hart's writings are internally coherent and generally consistent with experience, notwithstanding some very superficial reading of Clausewitz and sometimes, of history. It argues that his theoretical writings continue to have relevance to contemporary operational problems.

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Theorist for the 21st Century

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PREFACE

This monograph had its inception in an offhand remark made by one of the military reformers who fight their battles inside the Capital Beltway. He said apropos of some other subject, now forgotten, "Don't read Liddell Hart. He is terrain oriented." Although the characterization as 'terrain oriented' is frequently used to describe plans and operations, it lacks specificity and has become little more than a term of general opprobrium. I was not 'up' on Liddell Hart but the comment struck me as somewhat odd given everything I had read about Liddell Hart. It seemed high time I learned more about the interwar theorist so I undertook the reading of everything he published which was readily available. This reading was in chronological order so that I might gain some insight on the evolution of the author's ideas over time.

This paper is the first part of what I hope will be a longer study of three periods of Liddell Hart's creative life. The two additions I would make are a study of his theoretical works from 1933 through 1939, and the post war theoretical writings. The object of such a study would not be to displace the work of Jay Luvaas or Brian Bond so much as to supplement them from perspective of a practicing soldier.

I have received significant assistance from two members of the S&A faculty. Lieutenant Colonel Hal Winton and Professor Jim Schneider read the paper as it developed and provided advice and criticism which was most helpful. As I am somewhat hardheaded about accepting criticism I must retain responsibility for those flaws that remain. Lieutenant Colonel Winton is an extraordinary scholar of the interwar years and Professor Schneider shares with me a fascination with the epistemology of ideas. I am greatly in their debt for the most stimulating part of this fellowship year.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction and Methodology

"When the writer (or the artist in general) says he has worked without giving any thought to the rules of the process, he simply means he was working without realizing he knew the rules. A child speaks his mother tongue properly, though he could never write out its grammar. But the grammarian is not the only one who knows the rules of the language; they are well known, albeit unconsciously, also to the child. The grammarian is merely the one who knows how and why the child knows the language."¹

Umberto Eco

Eco's remarks, adopted as the theme of this article, echo those of Clausewitz on the relationship of theory and practice.² Both thinkers testify that the proper function of the theorist, of grammar or of war, is explanation. Both assert a distinction between understanding and execution. Clausewitz, going further than Eco, maintained that theory is not a proper guide for action.³

Now, if understanding is not a guide for action, prophesy is no part of theory; a fact which has not prevented various theorists from assuming the role of prophet. At best most who have crossed the boundary between explanation and action have provided opaque visions; at worst, totally inappropriate advice. Yet lack of success in prophecy is by no means evidence of theoretical error. The theorist provides a conceptual framework useful for the analysis of the phenomenon with which he is interested. This framework must be internally coherent and congruent with experience. The success of a theorist is proportional to the extent his explanations further understanding. Whatever else he does, if he succeeds in this he is successful as a theorist. A case in point is B. H. Liddell Hart.

Basil Henry Liddell Hart was born in Paris in 1895, the son of an English clergyman then serving a parish of expatriates.⁴ In 1913 young Liddell Hart went up to Cambridge, to Corpus Christi College. The following year his formal education was cut short by the outbreak of the World War. He received a temporary commission in the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry and went out to France in 1915. He was injured sufficiently by the concussion of an artillery shell to be evacuated to England before the year was out. He was back in the line in time to be wounded and gassed on the Somme the following July. He was evacuated to England again and spent the remainder of the war recovering and training citizen soldiers at home. He remained in the Army until he was placed on half-pay by a medical board in 1924 consequent to the injuries sustained in the war. He was retired in 1927. His experiences in the trenches left a lasting impression and were the source of inspiration and compulsion for the rest of his life.

Liddell Hart began writing on military affairs during the period he was training replacements for the armies in France. In 1925, after being placed on half-pay, he was employed as military correspondent first to the Morning Post, then to the Daily Telegraph where he succeeded the famous Colonel Repington. He moved to The Times in the same capacity ten years later. In 1939, prompted by ill health and disagreement over editorial policy, he surrendered that extraordinary platform, just prior to the outbreak of the war for which he had tried to goad the British Army into preparation during the preceding twenty years.

By the time he moved to The Times Liddell Hart had formulated the set of concepts which formed the structure of his thinking on war for the remainder of his life. Central to these ideas was the fundamental belief that war was a phenomenon properly the subject of a history-based science. While skeptical that war could be abolished, he was supremely confident that dispassionate study and reason could lead nations to a less expensive and more efficient way of conducting those wars which could not be avoided.⁵ Exposition of this science was the driving purpose behind his historical and theoretical writing.

This monograph will trace the early writings of B. H. Liddell Hart in order to establish a basis for evaluating his continuing relevance as a theorist of war. Particular attention will be given to that dimension now called the operational level. The paper will examine his theoretical, historical, and reform-oriented essays with primary attention given the first. All must be considered because all were a part of his approach to the phenomenon of war. The paper is not intended to be a biography and its scope is limited to the question of theoretical adequacy. Liddell Hart played many roles. He was first and foremost a journalist who wrote to support himself and his family. He was a believer in advocacy journalism. He had a clear point of view which pervaded much of his writing. Today many of his most controversial practical issues have been overcome by history and many of the terms of argument have changed so much that they are no longer recognizable. The question at hand is the extent to which his theoretical constructs remain valid.

The same qualification applies to his merits as a historian. Although Liddell Hart used history as a basis for his thought and writing, he did not write scholarly history in the sense that Michael Howard or Peter Paret write history. He did write good if somewhat idiosyncratic popular history, particularly of the World Wars and the American Civil War.⁶ To the extent that he requires classification, he was a critic rather than historian.⁷ However, for the purposes of this article the question of his relative merits as a historian or even an original thinker are beside the point. Neither bears directly on the question of theoretical adequacy.

Finally, this paper will not make judgments concerning Liddell Hart's claims of influence on various war ministries and armies. Such questions are sterile in any event. Soldiers and politicians are pragmatists who seldom adopt anyone's ideas in toto. Like Eco's child, they act without necessarily knowing why or how in terms that would satisfy the theorist. Their debt to the theorist is not for the actions taken, so much as for the insight to ask the proper questions and to understand the implications of the answers they receive before deciding to act.

Any attempt to evaluate the writings of B. H. Liddell Hart must be prefaced by a brief discussion of the sources and methodology to be used.

Liddell Hart was a prolific writer. Some of his works are clearly of more importance than others. Obviously one is left with a problem of

discrimination. To this end help comes from his Memoirs which provide a commentary on the evolution of his thoughts. In addition, Liddell Hart assisted in the process of discrimination by the way he worked. He reused his best ideas. Often they would first appear in a journal or newspaper article. Some then would find their way into revised articles or as constituent parts of books which were collections of essays selected for publication as works organized around some common theme. Such selective reuse is taken here as confirmation of the author's general satisfaction.

Two other books provide special assistance. In 1944 Liddell Hart cobbled together a rather remarkable work titled Thoughts on War.⁸ He organized a collection of his ideas, written down over the previous twenty-five years, into the form of a treatise on war. The thoughts which vary from a sentence or two in length to several paragraphs are dated and ordered by topic. One can assume three motives behind this work. Like all of his books there was a financial interest, especially since the author had terminated his regular employment with The Times in 1939. Secondly, there was a desire for self-justification. Liddell Hart's writings in the mid and late thirties, viewed in context of the events of May-June 1940, had injured his reputation severely and his works thereafter show an almost pathetic desire to demonstrate that he had been right all along.⁹ Finally, the book was his one attempt to lay down a coherent treatise on war, or at least an acceptable surrogate for one.¹⁰ It is difficult to read because there is no transition from one thought to another. It is valuable, however, as a check on conclusions

drawn from a sequential reading of the author's more important works. Special value is also accorded Liddell Hart's final book, A History of the Second World War. Criticism contained therein represents his application of the conceptual model with which he had struggled all his life. In a very real sense it represents his final word on the subject of war.

This paper begins with a sequential discussion of Liddell Hart's theoretical essays. Particular attention is given those printed in the Army Quarterly and Journal of the Royal United Service Institution because they were addressed specifically to a professional military audience. This discussion is supplemented by consideration of those books which represent either consolidation or initiation of a new line of inquiry. Where it is useful, Liddell Hart's ideas will be classified as tactical, operational, or strategic according to their pertinence to the engagement, campaign, or war respectively. These are not Liddell Hart's categories or points of discrimination although he clearly believed a similar hierarchical relationship existed between activities of war. The contemporary trinity will be employed for purposes of simplicity and clarity. Ambiguities which result from imposing these categories over Liddell Hart's own will be dealt with as necessary. Use of these three categories will permit development of tentative assertions about the development of Liddell Hart's views on war. Conclusions will be validated or tested against remarks from the Memoirs, Thoughts on War, and the History of the Second World War.

NOTES

Chapter 1

1. Umberto Eco, "Reflections on 'The Name of the Rose'," Encounter, LXIV (April, 1985), 8.
2. "... what genius does is the best rule, and theory can do no better than show how and why this should be the case." Carl von Clausewitz, On War, ed. and trans. by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), p. 136.
3. Ibid., p. 141, 578.
4. The definitive biography is still Liddell Hart's autobiography which covers the period prior to World War II. B.H. Liddell Hart, The Liddell Hart Memoirs, 1895-1938, 2 Vols. (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1965-66). This should be balanced by reading Brian Bond, Liddell Hart: A Study of his Military Thought (London: Cassell, 1977), the pertinent chapter of Jay Luvaas, The Education of An Army (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1964), pp. 376-424, and most especially, two essays by Michael Howard, "The Liddell Hart Memoirs," Encounter, XXX (February, 1966), 58-61, and "Liddell Hart," Encounter, XXXIV (June, 1970), 37-42. A surprisingly balanced evaluation of the man and his memoirs is also found in Col. T.N. Dupuy, "The Selective Memoirs of Liddell Hart," Army (August, 1966), 36-38, 81.
5. Michael Howard has pointed out that Liddell Hart and J.F.C. Fuller (who shared this view) were the successors to Jomini in what Howard called the 'Classical Tradition' of military thought. Michael Howard, "Jomini and the Classical Tradition in Military Thought," in The Theory and Practice of War, Essays Presented to Captain B.H. Liddell Hart, ed. by Michael Howard (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1965), pp. 3-20. On the classical tradition see also James E. King, "On Clausewitz: Master Theorist of War," Naval War College Review, XXX (Fall, 1977), 6-7, and Yehoshafat Harkabi, Theory and Doctrine in Classical and Modern Strategy, Working Paper Number 35, International Security Studies Program, The Wilson Center (October, 1981), pp. 1-41.
6. B.H. Liddell Hart, The Real War (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1964). The Real War was first issued in 1930. It was enlarged and reissued as A History of the World War, 1914-1918 by Faber in 1934. B.H. Liddell Hart, History of the Second World War (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1970). B.H. Liddell Hart, Sherman: Soldier, Realist, American (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1958) a reissue of the 1933 printing. The work was first published in 1929 by Eyre & Spottiswoode.
7. A distinction of interest primarily to historians. It was first made by Hans Delbruck. See Peter Paret, "Hans Delbruck On Military Critics and Military Historians," Military Affairs, XXX (Fall, 1966), 148-152.
8. B. H. Liddell Hart, Thoughts on War (London: Faber and Faber, Ltd., 1944).
9. Howard, "Liddell Hart", p. 41. Howard writes: "For the rest of his life he was to display an almost pathetic need for praise and appreciation, treasuring every scrap of evidence of his influence and every tribute to his abilities...."
10. Liddell Hart, Thoughts on War, pp. 7-8.

CHAPTER II

The Beginnings

"When thinking into problems I have tended to proceed on the operational method of advancing to a point; immediate consolidation of the ground gained; flankward extension of the penetration to link it up with those made on other sectors; further advance in depth from this broadened springboard."¹

B. H. Liddell Hart

Liddell Hart's characterization of his philosophic method was reasonably accurate. He went on to say that he began with "...a local penetration into minor tactics, [which] came to be successively extended through the sphere of combined tactics, strategy, combined strategy, and policy, to the philosophy of war."² This too was a fair representation although the progress was by no means as clean or sequential as this quotation would indicate. He did not necessarily drop a subject because he had picked up another. His categories were flexible not rigid divisions. Nonetheless, his ideas tended to evolve in a systematic way. While still a serving officer he started with practical matters of infantry organization and tactics. As he became interested in mechanization his outlook broadened to operational questions. This trend was accelerated when he left the service and became a journalist. His interests as a newspaperman naturally expanded to include issues of military policy. At the same time forays into history provided both a laboratory in which to test his ideas and a source of stimulation for new departures. In the course of this growth the soldier-become-critic arrived at a coherent philosophy of war.

It should not be surprising that the theorist's views changed over time as he observed various developments and as his ideas matured. One

must keep sight of the context in which the various articles were written. The technology which we take for granted was seen only dimly in the twenties. Liddell Hart's base experience and frame of reference remained the Western Front of World War I. What he wrote in a speculative vein was conditioned by the need to extrapolate from experience, history, existing but rapidly changing technology, and guesses as to future possibilities.

While convalescing in England in 1916, Liddell Hart wrote a memoir of the Somme which was accepted for publication by Cornhill Magazine, a survivor of those literary journals that graced Victorian England. In the event, publication was blocked by the War Office. This essay would seem to have been remarkable mainly for the high praise it afforded the high command.³ The first works actually to see print were some training guides for units of the Volunteer Force written in 1917 and 1918 while Liddell Hart was assigned as adjutant to volunteer battalions.⁴

It is not altogether surprising that Liddell Hart's early interests were practical and directly related to both the tasks he had at hand and his own combat experience. His first postwar essays also dealt with matters of immediate experience and practical interest. Nonetheless they demonstrated a marked bent toward conceptualization and inductive speculation. The fact that they were printed in the principal professional journals of the day introduced Liddell Hart to a wide and influential professional audience. They also represented the beginning in a significant way of an intellectual quest to define properly the role of his own arm of the service, the infantry, in the face of

conditions of modern war. His position on this issue would vary over time. His speculations about this question would be one of the areas in which he would carve out a unique position among theorists of mechanization.

Liddell Hart's immediate post-war writings addressed two problems, one practical, the other derivative and theoretical. The first was to discover and articulate the most efficient method of infantry attack upon a zone of defense such as that which existed in the latter stages of World War I. The second was to provide an abstract or theoretical explanation for the former to aid understanding by those called upon to carry out such an attack. He began by treating the practical activities of the smallest infantry units, the section and platoon. He followed his initial inquiries with an attempt to develop simultaneously principles of tactical behavior and a common system of action applicable to all units from platoon through army. The former became the 'Man-In-The-Dark' Theory of War, the latter, the 'Expanding Torrent' System of Attack.

Liddell Hart postulated an army articulated to section level as the necessary adaptation to the fragmented battlefield. The basic building block was the section, "the unit of command," which represented "the largest number of men [6] who can be directly controlled in action by a single leader."⁵ The section, however, was viewed as "incapable of tactical sub-division, and therefore ... limited to frontal action." It was the platoon which was the "combat unit", defined as containing "all the weapons with which infantry can be armed without losing their

essential mobility", "of sufficient strength to deal with the normal centre of resistance", and containing "the requisite sub-divisions or sections, each capable of separate manoeuvre."⁶ Battle was envisioned as a set of simultaneous encircling maneuvers in which some sub-elements fixed enemy strong points by fire while others moved through gaps between strong points to "outflank or enfilade" the enemy.

With this picture in mind a number of rules fell out: the importance of the use of cover and of rapidity of movement, the idea that reinforcements were to be pushed in at points of success in order to provide for encirclement of those places where the enemy was holding fast, and the vital importance of using one's initiative always to get forward. The need to reinforce success rather than failure was a dramatic departure from prewar ideas. Now the goal of the attack was "an automatic and continuous progressive infiltration by the combat units"⁷ In the defence the goal was "to do everything in one's power to protract the resistance as long as it is humanly possible, in order to afford time for the higher command to make the necessary dispositions in rear for dealing with the enemy's offensive."⁸

Liddell Hart also addressed the need to restore infantry to its proper role on the battlefield. In 1919 the early theorist of blitzkrieg commented skeptically on ideas of the future which postulated "ironclad landships" and "swarms of armoured aeroplanes".⁹ He maintained that infantry would retain its position as the decisive arm, noting that "the essential quality of infantry lies in their power of manoeuvre."¹⁰ Providing heavier weapons to the combat unit would

inhibit this essential feature, in fact had done so, requiring the infantry to wait on events. The answer was to be found in making the tank a weapon of infantry, a tank section for each platoon. The tank would fight with the unit and carry its impedimenta. It is important to note that this suggestion was not intended to deny that the Tank Corps should be a distinct arm for use as advance guards or forces of exploitation. There were to be specialized tanks for both roles.¹¹ For good or ill the BMP and Bradley Fighting Vehicle would seem to be the realization of this vision.

In successive essays Liddell Hart developed these ideas into an ever more sophisticated explanation of the phenomenon of modern battle. He continued to focus on the infantry but raised his eyes from the platoon to the company and battalion. He also began the search for "essential principles of war...the essential elements...true of any fighting...", upon which to base his tactical system.¹² During 1920 these developments were supported and furthered by events in his personal and professional life. Never satisfied to trust to fate to bring his ideas to the attention of others, he provided a copy of an early article to Lieutenant General Sir Ivor Maxse, General Officer Commanding the Northern Command. This led to a posting to the staff of Brigadier General Winston Dugan and involvement in the drafting of the first postwar infantry training manuals. That same year, in a similar way, he also began his lifelong correspondence with then Colonel J. F. C. Fuller, unquestionably a source of stimulation and criticism.¹³

"The Man-in-the-Dark Theory of War," was Liddell Hart's attempt to provide an explanation of battle by deduction from analogy, in this case the analogy for war of individual combat between men fighting in the dark. He placed his combatants in the dark to reflect the fact that in battle one seldom began with perfect or even good information of an enemy's dispositions or intentions.¹⁴ The theory had as its purpose a functional analysis of battle and as its outcome a corresponding organization of a tactical unit. "The Expanding Torrent System of Attack" took the result of the "Man-In-The-Dark Theory" and applied it to the tactical problem of advancing through a defensive zone.¹⁵

The central idea of the "Man-In-The-Dark" Theory of War was that all combat between men or armies could be reduced to the functions of hitting and guarding. The 'man-in-the-dark' had to seek his enemy, find his way to a vulnerable spot, fix his foe in place, deliver a knock out blow, then exploit his success. Particular emphasis was given the act of fixing before delivery of the decisive blow.

From this conceptual beginning Liddell Hart went on to describe the sequence of events in battle. These he described as "preparation," "decisive action," and "exploitation."¹⁶ The preparation phase involved locating the enemy and attacking him in sufficient force to force him to deploy his main body, to fix him, and, most important, to draw off his reserves. The decisive attack was inevitably a flank attack. Two insights from this analysis had particular merit. The first was the observation that while the decisive attack was made by the main body, it was not necessarily made by the largest portion of the force. The

largest fraction could well be required to locate, fix, and draw off the enemy reserves in order to make the decisive attack possible. Second was the idea that in modern war weight of force was a measure of fire power, not necessarily numbers of men.¹⁷ This was a perception that Liddell Hart could and did take too far on occasion. Numbers did still count, but numbers of categories of weapons, not numbers of men.

Exploitation was the final stage of the attack. For Liddell Hart it was "the critical moment" because it completed the disintegration and demoralization of the enemy force.¹⁸ The theorist noted that in the World War successful pursuit was prevented by the absence of suitable communications through the zone of battle. He speculated that caterpillar transport might well solve this problem "by abolishing the need for roads and light railways in the battle zone."¹⁹ Interestingly enough his reference here was not specifically related to the idea of armored fighting vehicles or tanks per se, simply the track as a means of locomotion.

From this conceptual edifice Liddell Hart moved on to the application of the essential principles to modern infantry tactics, specifically the functional organization of a force for battle. He was quite clear that the same principles applied equally to all units, from battalion to army.²⁰ He envisioned modern battle as the advance of "widely dispersed combat groups, containing comparatively few men but amply equipped with fire power, supported, moreover, by masses of auxiliary fire power such as artillery, machine-guns, tanks and land fighting aeroplanes."²¹ Each of these groups would advance in its own

sector, in what might appear to be a frontal attack, but each had the power to fix and maneuver against the centers of resistance located throughout a zone of defense. A superior headquarters could readjust the sectors in response to success in one place or the other. Battle had become an aggregate of independent engagements conducted by platoons, companies and battalions.

Liddell Hart postulated an organization of tactical units, battalion and above, into three parts; advance guards, main or maneuver bodies, and reserves. These accorded to the tactical functions of "preparation" (reconnaissance, location, fixing, and absorption of reserves), "decisive manoeuvre" (almost always a flank attack), and "exploitation".²² The battalion was the smallest unit to maintain a reserve because the battalion was the first echelon to be assigned objectives in depth.²³ The proper objective for the subordinate formations was the enemy. Companies and platoons should advance to the limits of endurance in pursuit of the enemy and the battalion's goal. The battalion's reserve was to pursue until relieved by follow-on units.

Liddell Hart was concerned to change the terms which referred to the subdivisions of a force. He felt the old words which dated from the prewar days, firing line and supports, produced patterns of thought contrary to the needs of modern conditions of war in which attack consisted of fixing and encirclement rather than reinforcement of stalled frontal attacks.²⁴ He tried to incorporate his new terms in the 1921 manual, Infantry Training, II: War, an effort in which he was only partly successful. The manual adopted instead the names forward body,

supports, and reserves.²⁵ He was more successful in securing adoption of his system of attack.

In 1926 the revised Infantry Training adopted a two element organization for all units platoon through battalion. These it called the forward body and reserve.²⁶ For purposes of consistency with Army regulations and between echelons of command, Liddell Hart adopted these terms and this tactical organization. In this double organization the reserve was in fact the old main or maneuver body; the forward body, the old advance guard. Pursuit was viewed as the duty of more mobile troops, presumably assigned to higher formations. At battalion level the differentiation required by theory was reduced to a question of tactical formations, generally squares or diamonds, for British infantry was organized on a system of fours (four platoons to a company, four companies to a battalion). If necessary, a part of the reserve (main body) could be earmarked for pursuit.

The second concept, "The Expanding Torrent System of Attack," was an attempt to develop a systematic way for the now reorganized tactical units to carry out his earlier idea of "automatic and continuous progressive infiltration". Early in the development of this idea he stressed the importance of initiative on the part of subordinate leaders in terms similar to those used to describe the German technique of Auftragstaktik.²⁷ While continuing to insist that the attacker, at any level of command, should push reserves through at points of weakness both to maintain the pressure on the enemy and to encircle enemy strong points, the new theory recognized the need to secure the flanks of any

penetration, indeed to widen the breach simultaneously "in proportion as the penetration is deepened, by automatically progressive steps...."28

This widening was to be the responsibility of elements temporarily held up in their forward progress. They were to maneuver subelements in the wake of adjacent units which were able to advance, encircle and destroy the source of their delay, and follow-on behind their still advancing forward elements. Liddell Hart compared this process of progressive widening to the wearing away of a channel by a swift torrent of water, hence the name, "The Expanding Torrent".

Although he assigned great importance to unslackened momentum in the attack, Liddell Hart also insisted that the advance of any echelon be contingent on either clearing enemy resistance in zone or making definite arrangements that any such resistance should be cleared. Control over the advance of forward elements was maintained by the proviso that they should continue on only so far as they were followed by their main or maneuver bodies thus avoiding progressive dissipation of forces. The defense in Hart's words was "the attack halted." The "Expanding Torrent" became the "Contracting Funnel." The forward bodies were still responsible for fixing the attacker, the maneuver bodies, their destruction.29

It is important to note that in both the "Man-in-The-Dark" theory and the "Expanding Torrent", Liddell Hart's focus remained on the action of infantry in the tactical arena. He postulated a more efficient, indeed a more 'scientific' way to penetrate and clear a defensive line or system of defensive positions. He did not address turning a tactical

victory to operational use, even as late as 1926. These two ideas formed the heart of a small book, A Science of Infantry Tactics Simplified which went to three editions and grew from 38 to 108 pages between 1921 and 1926.³⁰

Something of the theorist's attitude toward theory is revealed in his earliest postwar writings. Liddell Hart believed firmly in the need for a body of principles, "abstract governing truths", to serve as a bed-rock for both theory and action.³¹ Although he used the terms coined by J. F. C. Fuller and adopted by the British Field Service Regulations, maintenance of the objective, offensive action, surprise, etc., he was not wedded to the sort of single sentence aphorisms which have enjoyed currency from time to time in the U. S. Army. Indeed he used the term principle to classify a variety of concepts. Fuller was critical of Liddell Hart's early essays arguing correctly that he sometimes used the term principle not to identify a general truth but to postulate "rules which admit of exceptions".³² Liddell Hart's definitions were flexible as was his hierarchy. By 1926 he had come to the conclusion that eight principles were too many and he reduced them to one supreme law, economy of force, and three governing principles, security, mobility and surprise, which corresponded to guarding, hitting, and moving. The third, moving, was the link between the two essential functions.³³

Examination of the law of economy of force is instructive both about the eclectic way Liddell Hart developed principles of war and because it represents the central theme or purpose which unites his

entire theory of war. Initially economy of force was synonymous with efficient distribution of force and, in contrast to the American principle of the same name, subsumed both the idea of minimum essential combat power to secondary efforts (economy of force) and concentration of maximum feasible strength to accomplish the decisive objective (mass).³⁴ He defined the idea variously as: "seeking methods which will achieve a greater force behind the blow at a reduced cost in personnel;"³⁵ "the economic distribution of one's forces;"³⁶ or as "the universal law of economic expenditure of force."³⁷ Rather than referring to a narrow course of action the essential idea is that of economy as defined by the Oxford Dictionary, "careful management of resources, so as to make them go as far as possible."³⁸

As Liddell Hart's interests widened so did his application of the concept of economy of force. The index to his 1944 work, Thoughts on War contains references to all of the standard principles. There are thirty-one which apply to economy of force. These reveal entries written between 1919 to 1939 on matters as disparate as the 'indirect approach', tracked transport as a more efficient means of carriage, limited liability war, the value of a professional officer corps, and the ratio of fighter aircraft produced compared to bombers. The essential thread in all of these subjects is the goal, implied or explicit, that war, when necessary, should be waged at the least possible cost to both sides. That was the essential idea to which Liddell Hart devoted his life's work.

In criticizing Liddell Hart's earliest ventures into theory it is important to remember his age and experience. He was only twenty-five in November 1920, when he lectured at the Royal United Service Institution on the "Man-In-The-Dark" Theory of Infantry Tactics and the "Expanding Torrent" System of Attack. Both of his central ideas are striking even today for their clarity and firm good sense. Unfortunately, in some of his writing Liddell Hart wrapped these immanently good ideas in a sort of pretentious scientism not at all necessary for discussion of so practical a problem as the penetration of an enemy defensive zone. In great measure what Liddell Hart was doing was coming to terms with the tactical evolution that took place on the Western Front during the First World War. He was doing so from the perspective of the infantry company or battalion.

The concept of battle which went to France and Belgium with the B.E.F. was predicated on the approach march and meeting engagement. It called for two forces to come together (or one to move against another in an unknown position) in fairly compact bodies, then to gain 'fire superiority'; that is to build up a superior volume of fire by building up the firing line until the enemy was forced either to give way or was so dominated by fire that the advance could be resumed in the assault with the bayonet.³⁹ In 1914 both sides learned that the density of forces armed with semiautomatic rifles, machine guns, and quick-firing artillery was such that neither could achieve a superiority adequate to ensure an advance against even a hastily entrenched foe.⁴⁰ The armies were driven underground by the machine gun. Increasingly artillery

became the means of gaining fire superiority to facilitate the tactical advance. As the density and weight of artillery increased, the disposition of the two opposing lines changed. What were originally narrow bands of closely packed riflemen and machine guns became fortified zones in depth held by clusters of resistance. The counterattack became the decisive act of defense. This disposition reduced vulnerability to concentrated artillery fire and took advantage of the range, accuracy and volume of fire delivered by direct fire weapons. It also created the situation in which small independent bodies of infantry, sections and platoons, could achieve success by infiltration when lines of attackers could seldom get through the wire.

At first, like Eco's grammarian, Liddell Hart was explaining the how and why of battle in a highly original and coherent way. With the "Expanding Torrent System" he passed from description to prescription, to the point of providing tactical formations and methods of advance. In contrast to the German infiltration tactics of 1918, which were predicated on the combination of the effect of special 'storm troops' to disrupt and follow-on echelons to clear sectors of advance, Liddell Hart's scheme combined the two functions and assigned both to regular infantry units. His goal was a tactical procedure which could be carried out simultaneously by several echelons of command acting as "interdependent and subordinate working parts of a vast machine."⁴¹ Speed of advance was provided by the opportunism of each higher echelon in exploiting gaps located by subordinate units. But the "Expanding Torrent", with its insistence on zones of action and clearing prior to

advance, did not free the attacker from the need to fight each center of resistance. It simply provided a more efficient way to do so.⁴² Beyond the tactical level Liddell Hart's ideas were still immature. It is operational art, not tactics, that permits a commander to fight fractions and defeat armies. For Liddell Hart it would be speculation about mechanization and the study of history which would expand his vistas to the operational level of war.

NOTES

Chapter II

1. Liddell Hart, Thoughts on War, p. 7.
2. Ibid.
3. Liddell Hart, Memoirs, I, 26.
4. Ibid., pp. 29-32. These were, Points of Discipline for Volunteers, Points of Discipline for Volunteer Officers and NCOs, An Outline of the New Infantry Training, and New Methods of Infantry Training.
5. B.H. L.[iddell] Hart, "The 'Ten Commandments' of the Combat Unit. Suggestions on Its Theory and Training," Journal of the Royal United Service Institution, LXIV (May, 1919), 288.
6. Ibid., p. 288. Emphasis added.
7. Ibid., pp. 292-293.
8. Ibid.
9. B.H. L.[iddell] Hart, "Suggestions on the Future Development of the Combat Unit. The Tank as a Weapon of Infantry," Journal of the Royal United Service Institution, LXIV (November, 1919), 666-667.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid., p. 666.
12. B. H. Liddell Hart, "The 'Man-In-The-Dark' Theory of War; The Essential Principles of Fighting Simplified and Crystallized Into A Definite Formula," The National Review, LXXV (June, 1920), 473.
13. Liddell Hart, Memoirs, I, 38 et seq., 46.
14. There is evidence that this idea originated in his reading of Foch, presumably The Principles of War. Liddell Hart, "The Essential Principles of War and Their Application to the Offensive Infantry Tactics of Today," United Service Magazine, LXI (April, 1920), p. 33.

15. There is a clear evolution of these two ideas through four 1920 articles: B. H. Liddell Hart, "The Essential Principles of War," 30-44; B. H. Liddell Hart, "The 'Man-In-The-Dark' Theory of War; The Essential Principles of Fighting Simplified and Crystallized Into A Definite Formula," The National Review, LXXV (June, 1920), 473-484; B. H. Liddell Hart, "A New Theory of Infantry Tactics Based On A Direct Application of the 'Man-In-The-Dark' Theory of War," The National Review, LXXV (July, 1920), 693-702; and, B. H. Liddell Hart, "The 'Man-In-The-Dark' Theory of Infantry Tactics and the 'Expanding Torrent' System of Attack," Journal of the Royal United Service Institution, LXVI (February, 1921), 1-20. The final article also appeared in the Royal Engineer Journal and the American The Military Engineer both in 1921. Reference will generally be to the first mention of an idea or concept.

16. Liddell Hart, "The Essential Principles of War," p. 33. The terms changed over time to fixing, decisive manoeuvre, and pursuit. B. H. Liddell Hart, A Science of Infantry Tactics Simplified, (3d ed.; London: William Clowes and Sons, Ltd., 1926), pp. 24-47.

17. Liddell Hart, "The Essential Principles of War," p. 35.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid., p. 36.

20. Ibid., p. 39.

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid., p. 41 et seq. Liddell Hart, "A New Theory of Infantry Tactics," pp. 697-701.

23. Ibid., p. 701. Liddell Hart, "The Essential Principles of War," pp. 41, 44.

24. Liddell Hart, "A New Theory of Infantry Tactics," pp. 700-701.

25. Great Britain, War Office, General Staff, Infantry Training, II: War. (London: H. M. Stationery Office, 1921), pp. 56 et seq.

26. Liddell Hart, Science of Infantry Tactics, pp. xxv and 26 et seq.

27. Liddell Hart, "The Essential Principles of War," p. 32.

28. Liddell Hart, "The 'Man-In-The-Dark' Theory of Infantry Tactics and the 'Expanding Torrent' System of Attack," p. 13. These ideas were, for the most part, contained in Liddell Hart, "A New Theory of Infantry Tactics," p. 698, and Liddell Hart, "The Essential Principles of War," p. 41, albeit without the metaphor of the expanding torrent and with emphasis placed on the flanking orientation of each attack on a center of resistance. Whereas in the "Expanding Torrent" widening the breach was a sine qua non for the advance, it was referred to in the earlier essays only as "the double ideal".

29. Liddell Hart, "The 'Man-In-The-Dark' Theory of Infantry Tactics and The 'Expanding Torrent' System of Attack," pp. 15 et seq.

30. B. H. Liddell Hart, A Science of Infantry Tactics Simplified, (3d. ed.; London: William Clowes and Sons, Ltd., 1926).

31. Ibid., p. 2.

32. J. F. C. Fuller, "Captain Liddell Hart and Lieut. Colonel Bond; A Summary and a Judgement," The Royal Engineer Journal, XXXVII (March, 1923) pp. 62. Fuller was skeptical that one could establish a 'science' of infantry tactics arguing that "tactics are the application of this science [of war] to the ever-changing conditions of active operations." Ibid., p. 62.

33. Liddell Hart, Science of Infantry Tactics, p. xiv, 6-7.

34. Liddell Hart, "The Essential Principles of War," p. 31. For the evolution of the American Principles of War see John I. Alger, The Quest for Victory (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1982).

35. Liddell Hart, "Suggestions on the Future Development of the Combat Unit," p. 666.

36. Liddell Hart, "The Essential Principles of War," p. 31.

37. Liddell Hart, Science of Infantry Tactics, p. 8.

38. The Oxford English Dictionary, III (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 35.

39. Great Britain, War Office, General Staff, Field Service Regulations, Part I: Operations 1907 (With Amendments to 1914). (London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1914), pp. 136-145.

40. The classic study of the evolution of tactics in the World War remains that published by a brother officer from Liddell Hart's regiment, G.C. Wynne, If Germany Attacks (London: Faber and Faber, Ltd., 1940). The best recent account is John A. English, A Perspective on Infantry (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1981), pp. 1-37.

41. B. H. Liddell Hart, "The Soldier's Pillar of Fire by Night. The Need For A Framework of Tactics," Journal of the Royal United Service Institution, LXVI (November, 1921), 622.

42. It is not insignificant that in a defence of his theories the following year Liddell Hart wrote that he preferred to use the term "fix and manoeuvre tactics" to "soft-spot tactics" to describe his system. B. H. Liddell Hart, "Colonel Bond's Criticisms: A Reply," The Royal Engineer Journal, XXXVI (November, 1922), p. 300.

CHAPTER III

Evolution

"He believed in the importance of the truth that man could, by rational process, discover the truth about himself -- and about life; that this discovery was without value unless it was expressed and unless its expression resulted in action as well as education."¹

Adrian Liddell Hart

Two major themes dominated Liddell Hart's theoretical writings during the years that followed. The first of these was mechanization; the need for it, and the implications of it. The second concerned the nature of war. 'Mechanization' was an ambiguous term used to describe the general adoption of the internal combustion engine as a means of motive power in the tank, truck, and airplane. It was used more specifically to argue for adoption of tracked armored fighting vehicles and formations. Liddell Hart employed the term both ways. He began arguing seriously for mechanization in 1922. He would be identified with the subject for the rest of his life. He continued to address the topic until, because of general acceptance in the Second World War, his writings on mechanization merged with those of his second theme, the nature of war.

The theorist began his speculations about the nature of war in 1924 with a truly seminal article, "The Napoleonic Fallacy; The Moral Objective in War."² His essential idea, that rather than victory the end of war should be a more satisfactory peace, remained a fundamental assumption in the foundation of his military thought for the remainder of his life. Carried into the nuclear age, this idea made Liddell Hart

one of the first to articulate the theory of deterrence and limited war.³ The two themes of mechanization and the nature of war tended to overlap. Both grew out of Liddell Hart's earlier thoughts on the law of economy of force discussed above. Mechanization was, after all, no more than a means to a more rational way of waging war.

Liddell Hart added historical inquiry to these practical and abstract musings. These three fields of speculation tended to interact in some extraordinary ways. Professional historians, who prefer to explain events within their particular contexts rather than predict future relationships based on past events, discount much of Liddell Hart's history as special pleading. No doubt it was. That is not to say that it was without merit as interpretation or as a challenge to useful contemplation.

That in turn raises a fourth and final issue that must be addressed by anyone who wishes to understand Liddell Hart's view of the world, the epistemology of his ideas, or his views on the nature of knowledge. The early twenties provided the opportunity for the young 'Luther' to nail his own theses to the door of orthodoxy. He did so in a 1923 article published under a thinly veiled pseudonym. It was titled, "Study and Reflection v. Practical Experience".⁴ Together with his history, his criticism, and his theoretical speculations, the ideas contained in this article complete the framework of his thoughts on war. It is with this last issue that this chapter will begin.

Few professions are as intolerant of the questioner as the military. Armies succeed largely through the predictability born of obedience. It is because of this that armies tend to worship conformity. Indeed the whole idea of doctrine is based upon an ideal of conformity to certain shared principles. The negative side of such beliefs is that seniority and ascribed experience are not infrequently confused with possession of superior truth. Sadly this is no less true in even the best military schools. In such an environment the ad hominem argument based on superior rank becomes the last refuge of the intellectual coward or, what is more often the case, the superior too preoccupied by current affairs to reflect on the future. The questioner is ignored or derided not on the merit of his ideas but because of his temerity to challenge the accepted order from a position of assumed inferiority.

When Captain Liddell Hart presumed to postulate in categorical terms a new 'science' of infantry tactics, he did not go unchallenged.⁵ His reaction was both revealing and not a little ironic. It was revealing because it led him to set down his own views on the origin of a knowledge of war, views which were remarkably consistent throughout his life. It also demonstrated a rather surprising and deeply felt need to establish his bona fides as a legitimate critic on war. This need was to mark much of his writing especially after 1940. At the same time his emotional response to criticism was ironic. There was irony in the fact that the Army in the persons of Generals Maxse and Dugan had provided Liddell Hart, a relatively junior officer, an extraordinary

opportunity and scope for institutionalization of his ideas through work on the Army's infantry regulations. Similarly, the clear implication that the views of a junior officer or amateur were unwelcome to the profession at large seems somewhat misplaced from a twenty-five year old captain whose views found their way into the pages of the principal professional journals of the day and to the most distinguished professional platform in the realm, the Royal United Service Institution.

When Liddell Hart spoke of a science of war he used the term science in the manner of the social scientist not the physicist. While he justified his use of the word with a number of dictionary definitions, the most appropriate for his methodology was that from Webster's Dictionary: "Systematised Knowledge;" "knowledge classified and made available in work or the search for truth."⁶ His method of seeking knowledge was empirical and inductive. In 1919 he had written: "It should be the duty of every soldier to reflect on the experiences of the past, in the endeavour to discover improvements, in his particular sphere of action, which are practicable in the immediate future."⁷ In his 1923 article "Study and Reflection...", he spoke of "the pure food of military science" which could only be gained "by study of and reflection on the lessons of military history and their application, in the light of new weapons and conditions, to future war."⁸ He made the point even more clear in a 1927 revision of that same essay writing:

The aim of military study should be to maintain a close watch upon the latest technical, scientific, and political developments, fortified by a sure grasp of the eternal principles upon which the great

captains have based their contemporary methods, and inspired by a desire to be ahead of any rival army in securing options on the future.⁹

History then was his laboratory, what he called "the concentrated essence of universal experience...."¹⁰ But history provided only a framework or the conceptual model which the theorist had to vary as society and technology changed over time. Liddell Hart approached his theoretical writings with these ideas in mind, the inevitability of change within a framework of timeless principles, and the need to recognize and project these changes onto the future battlefields. It was from that point of view that he attempted to show that the internal combustion engine was the means by which military art could be returned to the future battlefields of Europe freeing civilization from the useless waste of the first Great War.

Liddell Hart's conversion to mechanization came in 1921. Its chief architect was J. F. C. Fuller.¹¹ Liddell Hart was still involved in drafting various infantry regulations. He also was asked by General Maxse to draft an article on infantry for the Encyclopaedia Britannica. The article was to be printed over the general's name. This Liddell Hart did. The doubts about the continued viability of traditional infantry which arose during these projects were heightened by Fuller's criticisms. Together, these led Liddell Hart to the conclusion that his earlier faith in the ability of the infantry to regain its dominant role in war was misplaced.¹² Consequently he embarked on his career as an apostle of mechanization. Of more immediate importance for his precarious military career was a heart attack suffered in the autumn of

1921. Clearly his impaired health remained a threat to continued active service.

The following year was an important watershed. Although he published two articles which defended and clarified various aspects of his essays on infantry tactics,¹³ his most important work was an essay written for the Royal United Service Institution Military Essay Competition on the subject of "the next great European War."¹⁴ The entry was modeled on, and attempted to carry forward, the award winning essay written by Fuller in 1919. Liddell Hart's essay was not selected for recognition. In fact, it was not published until 1924 when it appeared as two articles, one in the Royal Engineers Journal and the other in The Army Quarterly.¹⁵ Upon these essays, "The Next Great War," and "The Development of the 'New Model' Army," rests much of Liddell Hart's claim to be among the originators of mechanized warfare. Of more importance here is the departure which they represent in Liddell Hart's theory of war. For, as will be shown below, these articles made possible Liddell Hart's entry into the realm of operational theory, the regime in which he would enjoy his greatest success.

The two Essay articles were based upon the same historical imperatives. First, they postulated the idea that the evolution of warfare must follow pari passu developments of civil scientific invention.¹⁶ Second, they maintained that the decisive weapon in any war had generally been known, albeit in an undeveloped form, in the previous war. Surprise in past wars had generally been founded on

changes in technique or application which enabled one side or the other better to employ the tools already at hand.¹⁷

"The Next Great War" was a general inquiry to draw the appropriate conclusions about current developments and realistic prospects in civil and military technology. Liddell Hart considered their effect on tactics and strategy. The former he defined as "the domain of weapons," concerned with destruction "whether it be of the enemy's flesh or his will-power, the bodies of his troops or the nerves of his commanders and governments."¹⁸ "Strategy", he wrote, was "the science of communications," "concerned with the primary element, movement."¹⁹

Although these definitions were significant, the discussion itself was mixed. The strategic side consisted of an examination of land, sea, and air movement in light of the effects of the new conditions of transport. It is clear that Liddell Hart saw glimmerings of the potential of airpower for early warning and air-land interdiction. He recommended use of the caterpillar track as a means to improve land transport. Nonetheless, the strategic or operational discussion of "The Next Great War" was uninspiring. Still missing was any consideration of strategic direction or objective. Yet the foundation for such discussion clearly was falling into place.

The tactical discussion was better. Liddell Hart pointed to the dilemmas facing the traditional arms: Infantry lost essential mobility if provided with the arms necessary for success on the modern battlefield; horse cavalry was so vulnerable to fire as to be unable to

exist at all; field artillery was too slow to deal with tanks and aircraft unless fitted in a tank or on a mobile carrier; and heavy artillery's job could be performed better by aircraft. The tank carried more fire power than the infantry platoon and the airplane's mobility made it superior to all of the traditional arms except that it required bases to which to come home. Those bases would have to be defended because it was clear they would be sought as targets by enemy ground forces. It is significant that Liddell Hart recognized the interdependence of air and land forces, what he called together over-land forces. Surprisingly for a man suffering the ill effects of gas, Liddell Hart touted gas as the ultimate weapon, in its non-lethal form the most effective and humane. The adoption of the gas weapon, he maintained, would only confirm the already clear dominance of the tank and airplane as the chief weapons of land warfare.

The outcome of all this, at some future date, was an army in which operations would be "carried out almost exclusively by fleets of tanks and aircraft which will be maintained by communications based on the caterpillar tractor...."²⁰ Of the traditional arms only heavy artillery and infantry would survive. The former would become again garrison artillery. The infantry would become "land marines for the defence of fortified bases and to be discharged as "landing" parties from the bowels of a tank fleet, for "ferret work" against suitable objectives."²¹ Liddell Hart did say that such an evolution would take time. It would have to be progressive. It must not sacrifice security. And it must be conditioned by financial stringency. The successor

piece, "The Development of A 'New Model' Army", was his program to develop such a force in a deliberate and step by step process.

Liddell Hart's proposals for the 'New Model' Army provided for two periods of development. Neither was of particular duration, rather both provided a set of priorities or a sequence for the 'mechanical- ization' of the Army. In the intermediate period the goal was a division of three brigades, each of which would have two battalions of tanks to three of transport-borne infantry. Each brigade was also to have a brigade (mixed battalion) of mechanized artillery.²² The scheme to develop this force was progressive. It sought to balance outlays for material with cuts in personnel and the traditional arms. The goal of every step was "an improvement in speed, and power of concentration."²³

The first step proposed was the motorization of division transport. This was to be followed in turn by motorization of battalion transport. The latter was to be accomplished by providing each company four tractors. Each tractor was to draw a trailer, lightly armored, to carry one of the four platoons as far as the company assembly area. The tractor and trailer would also carry necessary heavy weapons and unit supplies. While this reequipping was going on there was to be a simultaneous reduction in the number of infantry units and a corresponding increase in the Tank Corps. In the third stage the artillery would be 'mechanicalized'. Most was to be tractor drawn. Some would be fully mechanized in the sense it was to be self-propelled and armored in some fashion. The final step of the intermediate development called for the armored trailers to be replaced by "armoured

caterpillar transporters," vehicles which can only be understood as armored personnel carriers, the function of which was to carry the infantry through the artillery zone disembarking them undercover at the point of deployment.

Tanks were not to be placed in the infantry battalions. Liddell Hart was unwilling to tie tanks to the pace of infantry, nor did he see any longer the utility of designing a special tank for incorporation in the infantry. He envisioned two echelons of tanks in an attack. The first, heavy tanks, would attack enemy tanks and anti-tank positions. These would be followed by a second echelon of light tanks that would attack simultaneously with the infantry to destroy centers of resistance which held up the soldiers who fought on foot. The goal was a division which had 60% of the personnel, 3 to 4 times the speed, 3 1/2 times the gun power, and 10 times the machine guns of an existing division.

The long term development would result in the division foreseen in the first essay. This was a division in which the tank forces had swallowed infantry, field artillery, engineers, and signals. Cavalry would be mechanized and, interestingly enough, airplanes were to be incorporated in the division. The link between the fighting forces and bases in the rear would be made up of special purpose tanks rather than less flexible and more vulnerable railroads. Although Liddell Hart employed the naval warfare metaphor common in those days and projected names for tank classes drawn from ships (eg., cruiser and battle tanks), he warned that the analogy with sea warfare should not be taken too far. He saw no likelihood for the development of a land "Dreadnought". "The

obstacles and surface friction met with on land will impose a limitation on the size of land ships, as well as consideration of damage to property, and the advisability of using the road systems as long as possible until in the neighbourhood of enemy forces."²⁴

To train such a force large all-arms exercises were called for. In recognition of the speed at which modern science developed new technologies, a wise army would establish a technical research and design establishment and a tactical research department to work out the best way to employ new developments. An essential component was an "experimental" force "to test out practically the application to the troops of new tactical and technical ideas."²⁵

In the summary or epilogue of this piece, Liddell Hart sounded his call to arms. "The note which rings throughout this article" he wrote, "is that of all qualities in war it is speed which is dominant, speed both of mind and movement...."

This speed, only to be obtained by the full development of scientific inventions, will transform the battlefields of the future from squalid trench labyrinths into arenas wherein manoeuvre, the essence of surprise, will reign again after hibernating for too long within the mausoleums of mud. Then only can the art of war, temporarily paralyzed by the grip of trench warfare condition, come into its own once again.²⁶

These essays provide evidence that Liddell Hart's view of war was becoming more sophisticated. In contrast to his earlier writing, these twin essays were more conceptual, addressing combined tactics rather than the practical actions of small units. They responded to Fuller's criticism that the "Expanding Torrent" system was a method more suitable

to tanks than vulnerable men.²⁷ But Liddell Hart did not abandon entirely the idea that infantry, men who fought on foot, still had a significant role to play in war. His "land marines" gave up the idea of infantry only so far as that idea referred to the long columns of heavily laden men Liddell Hart had led down the roads and lanes of France and Flanders. He had not given up the belief that men on foot retained an offensive utility born of a unique locomobility and a distinct tactical threat that could not be duplicated by a machine.²⁸

In the "New Model" Army Liddell Hart provided a vision of a balanced and much more mobile force, an army which did not exist anywhere in 1922. Some of the details would change over the next twenty years as technology varied the conditions under which armies would have to fight. Improved antitank rifles, wireless communications, significant changes in airframe technology and vehicle design capabilities all would play a role. Nonetheless, the essential framework remained firm. In the anticipated capabilities of this force Liddell Hart would find the means to apply those principles that now seemed so far beyond the abilities of the World War I infantry division; principles that lay at the heart of the military art.

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In 1924 Liddell Hart's life changed dramatically. In July of that year he was placed on half-pay, the result of another of the medical boards which had become a regular feature of his career. This event confronted him with the need to find a new means of financial support.

He turned to journalism and popular history. He became assistant military correspondent for the Morning Post and covered the 1924 Territorial Army camps. As a free-lance journalist, he provided coverage of that season's tennis and rugby matches to a number of prominent papers. That same year he published the first of a series of articles for Blackwoods which dealt with those he believed to have been Great Captains. In 1927 these articles became the chapters of his book Great Captains Unveiled. According to his memoirs, the result of all this activity was a respectable increase in income.²⁹

Just prior to his change of careers, in June of 1924, Liddell Hart wrote an article titled "The Napoleonic Fallacy; The Moral Objective in War."³⁰ This one article, in a long defunct journal, was the decisive turning in Liddell Hart's intellectual life. It was his first comprehensive look at the phenomenon of war. Like his early ideas on mechanization, the central thought in this piece was similar to notions treated earlier by J. F.C. Fuller.³¹ Liddell Hart took Fuller's major premise, that the end of war was a more satisfactory peace, and developed from it a series of ideas uniquely his own, very different in implication from Fuller's original design. The essay and the ideas it contained enjoyed a long life. Incorporated with the 1922 articles on mechanization, it was the basis of Liddell Hart's first theoretical book, Paris; Or the Future of War. Enlarged, it was the central chapter of the 1928 book, The Remaking of Modern Armies. Its implications were the governing ideas behind the strategy of the "indirect approach". And, merged with an increasing conviction that war went wrong with

Clausewitz, it underlay The Ghost of Napoleon. It was at the heart of Liddell Hart's search for a "British Way in Warfare" and the idea of "limited liability". It was still central to Liddell Hart's criticism of the Allies conduct in his History of the Second World War. Without a doubt, this short work contained the most important set of ideas that Liddell Hart ever had.

In November, 1922, The Royal Engineers Journal published a response by Liddell Hart to a criticism of his theories of infantry tactics. His interlocutor believed, Liddell Hart wrote, "that victory can only be gained by defeating in battle the armed forces of the enemy." But this, Liddell Hart said, "...was shown by the last war to be distinctly unstable. The conquest of the enemy nation's will to resist is the fundamental principle and if, with new developments, this can be effected without the former result, the armed forces can and will be neglected as the main objective."³² It was this theme to which he returned in 1924 and it was this policy of decisive battle that he called the Napoleonic Fallacy.

Liddell Hart attributed the "Napoleonic Fallacy" to the general staffs of Europe. While admitting their technical and executive expertise, he laid the cost and futility of the last war to their strategic shortsightedness. It is noteworthy that his view of strategy in this context clearly exceeded in sophistication "the science of communications".³³ Strategy, though not defined, here dealt with the question of selection of objectives the accomplishment of which would insure achievement of the nation's goals.

The theorist whose work to this point had been concerned with the tactical end of the spectrum of military activity now leapt to the other pole and began his search for economy in war with an examination of the most likely definition of national policy. This he set as "an honorable, prosperous, and secure existence."³⁴ With that as the end of national policy, the object of war must be "to ensure a resumption and progressive continuance of ... peace time policy, with the shortest and least costly interruption of the normal life of the country."³⁵ As the only obstacle to this end was the enemy's will to oppose the nation's policy, the military object must be "to subdue the enemy's will to resist, with the least possible human and economic loss to itself."³⁶ Therefore, "the destruction of the enemy's armed forces is but a means -- and not necessarily an inevitable or infallible one -- to the attainment of the real objective."³⁷ Here, for the first time, was the dialectic of ends and means which, with the idea of economy of force, was to provide the internal consistency of Liddell Hart's best work.

There were, Liddell Hart continued, two alternatives to the strategic objective of destroying the enemy's armed forces. These were moral and economic. The moral objective, subduing the enemy's will to resist, could be sought in the military, economic, political, or social spheres. The weapons available were military, economic, and diplomatic. Liddell Hart did not choose to elaborate about nonmilitary economic and diplomatic means and the article is by no means clear as to whether he saw such methods used simultaneously or sequentially with military action.

Military action heretofore had been the work of armies and navies. Navies attacked the enemy's will by destruction of the enemy fleet or blockade of an enemy's overseas trade. Armies sought to impose their will through control of vital land communications, industrial resources, centers of government and population, capture of national leaders, or intimidation of the population. The trouble with armies was that they generally found an enemy army between themselves and the enemy source of power. So defeating the enemy army became essential as a means to peace, even if not an end in itself.

It was most significant that Liddell Hart now saw in the tank a weapon of operational significance. He wrote that, "...the tank...is the instrument which, by striking at the command and communications center of the enemy army, has brought this truer military objective [paralysis of the enemy's resistance] within reach...."³⁸ Although the tank offered anew the promise of a knockout blow against the enemy army's command and control apparatus and, inter alia a more economic military victory, the airplane, by its ability to strike hard and deep, offered the promise of striking at the seat of the enemy's will and policy, delivering peace in short order. With this argument Liddell Hart supported those who were defending the proposition that the airplane was not only a key partner in land warfare (his own earlier position) but represented a third strategic arm, capable of striking directly at the enemy's heartland. The weapon which would make such a blow both effective and inexpensive to both sides' post war prosperity was non-lethal gas.

How fantastic! How naive this view of strategic bombing seems today, after Warsaw, Rotterdam, and Coventry; Lubeck, Rostock, and Hamburg; Leipzig, Cologne, and Dresden. But Liddell Hart wrote these words in 1924. 1924 was the year after the French occupied the Ruhr without military opposition. It was the year the Munich revolutionary spent in Landsberg Prison. It was the year of the first Labour Government, the year before the second Baldwin Ministry reaffirmed the 'Ten Year Rule', and the year before the old Marshal Hindenberg became president of the German Republic.³⁹

Liddell Hart anticipated both moral and economic objections to deliberate attack of civilian targets. Against the economic argument he argued that the likely damage of a short air war would not exceed that of a prolonged land campaign. Nor did he see a great deal of difference in the effect on the civilian population compared to a prolonged war of nations-in-arms. He gambled heavily on the complexity, hence vulnerability to disruption, of a modern society and on the developing capability of airpower to strike swiftly and powerfully enough to disrupt the internal fabric of the state. Neither assumption was to be fulfilled in fact. Although the means of war were to prove vulnerable to air bombardment by 1944, the cost was extraordinarily high both during and after the war. The nation's will to war proved surprisingly resilient. But these are facts which were not available to Liddell Hart in 1924.

The author provided two historical examples of an attack on the 'moral' objective, Scipio's defeat of Carthage and Tsar Alexander's

capture of Paris in 1814. In both cases, he pointed out, the victor had ignored the enemy armies, commanded as they were by military virtuosos, and struck for the heart of the national will to war -- coincidentally, in these examples, the political center. As an example of the possible, both cases are probably valid. As a basis for proving a historical imperative, both suffer from a failure to consider the circumstances that defined the outcomes. Circumstances of the Second Punic War, especially the nature of the Roman and Carthaginian states, make generalization for the twentieth century dangerous indeed. In the case of the French, 1814 was the twenty-fifth year of almost continuous war. France was in a state of national exhaustion, not mitigated by the series of defeats and withdrawals that began in 1812. Yet Liddell Hart employed the events of that year as an analogy for prescribing actions to be taken at the outbreak of war. In that light, 1814 would appear a singularly inappropriate analogy.

In the conclusion to his article Liddell Hart recognized that his predictions as to the means of war might be overtaken by events in scientific developments. But he pointed again to what he believed to be the central issue, "the danger of a one-sided concentration on the "armed forces" objective...." He prayed of his readers:

Let us never again confound the means with the end; the goal in war is the prosperous continuance of our national policy in the years after the war, and the only true objective is the moral one of subduing the enemy's will to resist, with the least possible economic, human, and ethical loss to ourselves.⁴⁰

In 1925 Liddell Hart published a small book, Paris: Or the Future of War, part of a series by the American and British publishing firms of E. P. Dutton and Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, in which various authors speculated about what the future held for various sectors of social activity. For the most part, the book which ran to only 91 very short pages (86 in the American edition), repeated the arguments of "The Napoleonic Fallacy", albeit with some elaboration. Three of these additions are of interest because they provide a better balance to the original hypotheses. These ideas concerned Liddell Hart's views of the inevitability of war, his assumptions about how a nation's will to war could be undermined, and his clearest statement to date on the place and future of land warfare in light of his conclusions about objectives and means in war.

World War I had a profound effect on the British psyche. The cost of the victory and the disappointment with the political settlement produced a general disillusionment, one pole of which was popular pacifism. Bertrand Russell was only the best known of what was a wide movement of significant proportions. The views Liddell Hart expressed in "The Napoleonic Fallacy" were part of this reaction. He differed from the pacifists in the strong belief that war was an inevitable condition of human social life, unlikely to disappear just because men of good will wished it to do so. If war was inevitable, pacifism was no solution. What was necessary was intelligent preparation and intelligent conduct of those wars which occurred, in order "to limit

[their] ravages and by scientific treatment insure the speedy and complete recovery of the patient."⁴¹

Of course intelligent conduct required recognition of the hierarchical relationship of ends and means described in "The Napoleonic Fallacy". It was "the function of grand strategy to discover and exploit the Achilles' heel of the enemy nation; to strike not against its strongest bulwark but against its most vulnerable spot."⁴² In Paris, Liddell Hart elaborated his views about why and how a moral attack would take effect. Simply put, it was the view that normal men when confronted with a permanent superiority would surrender. As nations and armies are composed of normal men they could be expected to do the same.⁴³ Men would change their policy when the alternative was so much more unpleasant it could not be contemplated.

The problem with this view is that it ignores the question of intensity or the relative importance of the matters at issue between warring states. It assumes that citizens are aware of what is actually going on and act logically. It ignores the fact that some governments are more sensitive to public discouragement than others. And it presumes both sides to a conflict will recognize a common benefit in conflict limitation.

Liddell Hart based his conclusions on the belief, so soon to be proved false, that civilized nations do not fight wars of extermination.⁴⁴ One can argue whether Hitler's or Stalin's states were civilized. The fact remains that, confronted with absolute

alternatives, the national will proved very strong indeed. The Second World War gave ample evidence that nations do fight wars to absolute ends and that nations, Britain among them, do not necessarily put down the sword simply because logical calculation calls for surrender or settlement.

Of greater interest in the long term is Liddell Hart's argument for the continued viability of a land threat. "The Napoleonic Fallacy" could leave the reader with the impression that land forces were no longer required. In Paris he restored a balance, arguing that in grand strategy as in tactics a wise warrior keeps more than one weapon available.⁴⁵ In this case, the state required an army, navy and an air weapon.

The army weapon could only be effective, however, if the shortcomings of the last war were corrected in the next. The major shortcoming was that armies had become too large. The unwieldy mass produced by the nation-in-arms was too big to maneuver effectively. The army was not only too big but, because it was based on unprotected infantry, it was too vulnerable to achieve the necessary tactical successes at a reasonable cost, if at all. Finally, the means of conveyance, railroad and road-bound vehicles, were unable to provide for the needs of the large armies, particularly on the offensive.⁴⁶

The solutions were fairly obvious. By implication, armies must be smaller.⁴⁷ Communications must be freed from reliance on roads and railroads, by development of either tracked or multiwheeled, all-terrain

vehicles. Infantry would have to be transported and protected by armor prior to battle. The tank which combined in itself hitting power, protection, and mobility must become the arm of decision. The use of the armored force was obvious. It was:

to be concentrated and used in as large masses as possible for a decisive blow against the Achilles' heel of the enemy army, the communications and command centres which form its nerve system.⁴⁸

This is the essence of the operational level of war, the belief that there are specific targets in a theater of war, the destruction of which will achieve the strategic goal without the necessity of mutual and pointless slaughter. However, it would be incorrect to attribute to Liddell Hart that narrow a distinction. In Paris, he likened massed armor to the heavy cavalry of yore, and he addressed the action of cavalry in terms of its tactical role on what had been a geographically limited battlefield. He argued that tank forces represented the restoration of a mobile shock arm which would make possible the resurrection of the military artist to a larger field. While he recognized the relatively greater importance of the targets noted and, implicitly, the geometric effect which resulted from the greater breadth and depth of action available to the new arm, he apparently did not see the need for a distinct theater 'level' of war which would exist between tactics and a revised conception of strategy. This is consistent with his view that in war the same general principles applied equally to all 'levels' of war and the fact that he tended to concern himself with vertical divisions between arms rather than horizontal cleavages between 'levels' of action.

The great weakness of the arguments found in Paris was pointed out by the anonymous reviewer for the Times Literary Supplement. "Captain Liddell Hart gives no outline of the enemy's action during these various attempts [to defeat his will]." The reviewer continued: "It is a book which might well have been written by a brilliant civilian free from the encumbrance of technical military knowledge and making war with great ferocity with an army of words on a battle area of paper."⁴⁹

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Four years separated the publication of Paris and The Decisive Wars of History,⁵⁰ the next intrinsically theoretical work written by Liddell Hart. During these years he promoted mechanization in newspapers and journals. He collected some of his best essays on this and related subjects in a 1927 book titled The Remaking of Modern Armies.⁵¹ During the same four years Liddell Hart also established himself as a historical essayist. He published three historical works. A fourth, Sherman, followed The Decisive Wars almost immediately. In 1927 he was appointed editor for the military and military history departments of the Encyclopaedia Britannica to which he was already a contributor.⁵² This position was bound to provide him with a broad survey of articles on various aspects of military history in addition to his own reading and study.

While Liddell Hart's historical researches undoubtedly provided insights and examples for his subsequent theoretical and advocacy journalism, it is difficult not to see many of his historical writings

as products of the theory that his researches had spawned rather than products of history sui generis. In short, their purpose was often partisan, not mere reportage or historical explanation. The quality of the four histories is mixed. A Greater than Napoleon; Scipio Africanus (1926)⁵³ is an expanded treatment of the example used in "The Napoleonic Fallacy" and Paris to argue for a moral alternative to the military objective. Its successor, Great Captains Unveiled (1927),⁵⁴ is a collection of essays published in Blackwoods prior to their collection in a single volume. The selections are somewhat idiosyncratic.⁵⁵ Each of the five studies reflects some issue or provides some historical analogy useful in the arguments in which Liddell Hart was embroiled. In contrast, the 1928 volume Reputations,⁵⁶ contains a set of character sketches of World War I commanders that are among the best pieces Liddell Hart ever wrote. While important to the body of his World War I historiography these essays shed little light on the author's theoretical development. This is not the case with the 1929 biography of William T. Sherman.⁵⁷ While this book remains a classic study of the great American military figure, it must be seen as an extension of The Decisive Wars of History, a book which preceded it by some months.

It is not the purpose of this work to detail or evaluate Liddell Hart's role as a journalist or historian. However, his activities as a journalist and author are not unimportant to his accomplishments as a theorist. His occupation did keep him in touch with military developments and debates. Moreover, it provided him with access to military exercises from which he could and did draw conclusions about

his theories. Similarly, by his own testimony, the study of history occupied a significant place in the development of his theories.⁵⁸ For those reasons it is useful to survey his views as they were expressed in print in order to examine the matters that occupied his professional and literary attention in the years which preceded The Decisive Wars of History.

In September, 1925, the British Army held its first large scale maneuvers since 1913.⁵⁹ A scratch corps commanded by General Sir Philip Chetwode was opposed by a reinforced division under the command of General Sir Alexander Godley. Both forces were composed of traditional infantry and cavalry. Each had a tank battalion. Both commanders attempted to employ means of increased mobility to achieve tactical surprise. Both failed to attain decisive results for reasons Liddell Hart ascribed to "friction" although errors of execution seem as sound an explanation.⁶⁰

Liddell Hart drew a number of conclusions from this experience. He attributed a repeated failure of the two forces to come to grips with each other to a greater ease with which a force armed with machine guns could refuse battle by assigning a few men so armed the duty of covering a withdrawal. Liddell Hart argued that the cure was a more mobile (and protected) attacker, capable of fixing a reluctant enemy before a decisive blow was struck.⁶¹ He applauded Chetwode's use of tanks as a force of maneuver and in so doing credited Fuller with the idea that tanks were the means by which the cavalry function was to be reborn and with it the possibility of the "artist of war".⁶²

He raised an idea of current interest when he speculated that, in future, armies would be less and less interested in occupation of positions, seeking instead control by mobile forces "without occupation". He quoted one of the "most prominent actors" in the recent maneuvers to the effect that the proper objective in war was not clearing the infantry crust of an enemy position but using armored forces to penetrate and attack the vital localities of sustainment in the rear.

Liddell Hart also drew conclusions about the continued viability of the traditional arms of the service. Horse cavalry he simply wrote off as a dead loss. He was critical of the handling of the infantry in general but more important, he argued that what was needed was a "recasting [of] our ideas concerning the role and action of infantry." "Infantry," he wrote, "must become a special arm for a special role, just as tanks, artillery, aircraft and cavalry."⁶³ He argued that air interdiction would obviate the long marching columns of the World War and that air reconnaissance was an increasingly important requirement of the commander. He argued that the army required its own aviation assets over and above those of the R.A.F. whose role he apparently saw increasingly in strategic terms alone. Finally, he warned that post war experiment had gone on too long without resolution. "The paramount lesson of the maneuvers," he wrote, "is that our organization must at last take definite shape."⁶⁴

The following year Liddell Hart published the first of his histories, A Greater than Napoleon: Scipio Africanus. The book's

central theme is the moral objective in war, to which Liddell Hart added a discussion of the importance of the just peace as the necessary complement to the successful military outcome. Within this theme, the author examined various aspects of the Second Punic War. He discovered evidence to support the importance of "the tactical formula of fixing plus decisive manoeuvre,"⁶⁵ and its symbiotic partner, the tactical attack "du fort au faible".⁶⁶ He noted that Scipio recognized the need for a mobile arm of decision. He addressed such other matters as the importance of a secure base for the conduct of a campaign, the necessity of pursuit to garner the benefit of a tactical victory, and the relationship of grand strategy, "the transmission of power in all its forms," to what he called logistic strategy, "the combination in time, space, and force of the military pieces on the chessboard of war."⁶⁷ In the end he found Scipio superior to Napoleon in his use of grand strategy to attain a "prosperous and secure peace" and in his economical use of the forces and resources available to him.⁶⁸ Scipio, after all, ended his days honored and respected. Napoleon ended his defeated and in exile.

Throughout 1926 Liddell Hart continued to clarify and develop his case for mechanization. In 1927 he published The Remaking of Modern Armies, a collection of essays, several of which have their origin in the events of the previous year. The theme of Remaking of Modern Armies is mobility, "of movement, action, organization, and not least of thought." "For mobility of thought," wrote Liddell Hart, "implies originality in conception and surprise in execution, two essential

qualities which have been the hallmark of the Great Captains"⁶⁹

The book contains twenty chapters divided into four parts. Some of the articles have been discussed earlier. Among the twenty are "The Napoleonic Fallacy," and a somewhat softened version of "Study and Reflection v. Practical Experience," now retitled, "The Leadership of Armies",⁷⁰

In two articles originally written in September, 1926,⁷¹ and reprinted as the leading chapters of the Remaking of Modern Armies under the titles "The Army of a Nightmare" and, "The Cure-Mobility", Liddell Hart explained the need for mechanization by an examination of the trench stalemate of the First World War. The stagnation of the World War he laid to two influences. The first was a "material preponderance" of the means of defense over the means of offense.⁷² Specifically he referred to the increase of fire power throughout the nineteenth century. The widening material imbalance had been compounded, in his view, by the geometric increase in the size of armies. Together, he wrote, these influences were responsible for the "paralysis of mobility and of generalship as an art."⁷³

Since the war, indeed in 1926, the problem of the material preponderance of the defense had been increased even further by an event Liddell Hart called a landmark in military evolution. This was the introduction in that year of the six-wheel cross-country motor vehicle.⁷⁴ This development confirmed the trends already discussed. The defender's ability to concentrate machine guns at points of penetration was now all but unlimited. The cures for this condition

were four: armor, the internal combustion engine, new means of concealment (smoke), and "a reversion to highly trained professional forces."⁷⁵

Armor and the internal combustion engine meant the tank and the new cross country truck. Like "The New Model Army", "The Cure" offered an interim solution in which some infantry would be converted to mobile machine gun units transported by six wheelers. Liddell Hart also proposed a conceptual model of a future mechanized force. It was a near all-tank solution in which there were to be two types of tank, heavies to form a base for maneuver, and lights which replaced infiltrating infantry.⁷⁶

Liddell Hart showed some ambivalence about the degree to which the tank was to absorb other arms, especially infantry. At the close of this argument, he insisted again that even a mechanized army would require an infantry nucleus or "land marines". These "men-who-fight-on-foot" must become light infantry "...agile groups of skirmishers who will exploit to the full the tactics of infiltration and manoeuvre."⁷⁷ As noted earlier, in all his treatment of dismounted fighters he distinguished between machine gunners, "land marines", and infantry.⁷⁸ Failure to note this distinction has led some historians to maintain that Liddell Hart, like Fuller, saw the complete eclipse of dismounted combatants. In this light it is interesting to note that, in another chapter of this book where he again referred to the relative decline of the power of infantry, he anticipated a future reversal in

which "a modern successor of the longbow of Crecy is invented to restore the balance."⁷⁹

At another level, Liddell Hart wrote of massed tanks as the decisive arm of future battlefields. He did so in a piece whose original date is unclear though it is not unlikely that it came from a battlefield tour he took in 1926. It was titled "The Rebirth of Cavalry". In this chapter Liddell Hart reiterated his analysis of the tactical problem of the World War and he reverted again to his analogy for war of two men fighting.

Here in a nutshell is the ruling formula of all tactics ... that of fixing combined with decisive manoeuvre. That is, while one limb of the force fixes the enemy, pinning him to the ground and absorbing his attention and reserves, the other limb strikes at a vulnerable and exposed point -- usually the flank or line of retreat and communications. ... this convergent attack from two directions simultaneously was the master key used by all the great artists of war,⁸⁰

Prior to Napoleon, he continued, this was just a tactical maneuver. Napoleon's contribution was the demonstration that strategic (what we would call operational) convergence was also a possibility. It had been the combined mobility and hitting power of cavalry that had made such decisive action possible. When cavalry was no longer effective, infantry and artillery could still fix, disrupt, and disorganize an enemy, but there was no arm capable of delivering the decisive blow -- none until the tank. Liddell Hart repeated his call from Paris to recognize that the tank was not an infantry support weapon, but the military artist's force of maneuver, the successor to the cavalry. He

also insisted that for this role the ratio of one battalion of tanks to a division of infantry was far too small to form the necessary masse de manoeuvre.

Liddell Hart argued the case for the small professional army in the context of two seemingly unrelated chapters, one which addressed the perennial European disarmament conference, the other a comparison of postwar French and German military doctrines.⁸¹ To Liddell Hart, smallness seemed consistent with mechanization. With mechanization a few highly trained men could have far greater effect than a mass of conscript levies. A small professional army was stabilizing. It did not require the war-causing mobilization of 1914 because it was always ready. For Liddell Hart the idea was no less than a turning to quality rather than quantity as the organizing principle of armies.

The Germans had made such a turn albeit involuntarily. "The Germans," wrote Liddell Hart, "aim evidently to replace quantity by quality, and to release the power of manoeuvre ... by the skillful handling of smaller forces of superior mobility and training. It would seem that in this way only can the art of war, suffocated by unwieldy numbers, be revived."⁸² He preferred the German solution to the French mass conscript army whose doctrine continued to favor firepower to maneuver. The German doctrine, he wrote, paid attention to "the principles of surprise, mobility, and concentration, through manoeuvre, which have ever been the instruments of the Great Captains and are the soul of the military art."⁸³ What Liddell Hart did not seem to see was that smallness, or largeness, are meaningless except in relationship to

another. The smallness and doctrinal superiority of the German Army had done nothing to deter the French Ruhr policy in 1923. The whole question ignored the issue that quality and quantity are not rigidly bipolar concepts. What was one to do if a neighbor infused quality into a quantitatively superior army?

The theoretical underpinning of The Remaking of Modern Armies was in the revised "Napoleonic Fallacy" and "The Leadership of Armies". The former had been changed very little. Liddell Hart had added two additional examples of moral objectives, Alexander's attack toward the person of Darius at Arbela and Fuller's Plan 1919 which had been intended to paralyze the German defense by attacking and disrupting corps and army headquarters near the front with tanks. "The Leadership of Armies" was also relatively consistent in its major premises. It did, however, extend Liddell Hart's analysis of the deadlock of the Western Front. While it agreed with the opening chapters that the initial failures were the consequence of material changes, it attributed subsequent reverses to the fact that commanders "long forgot the cardinal lesson of universal military history -- that surprise is the master-key of war."⁸⁴

In the 1924 "Napoleonic Fallacy", Liddell Hart had blamed a too easy misunderstanding of Clausewitz for the general staffs' adherence to the military objective.⁸⁵ He offered in contrast the views of Marshal Saxe who had written "I am not in favour of giving battle ... I am even convinced that a clever general can wage war his whole life without being compelled to do so."⁸⁶ This comparison, which he repeated in the

1927 version, brought a critical review of The Remaking of Modern Armies by no less authority than Henry Spenser Wilkinson, in his youth a military critic as trenchant as Liddell Hart himself, in 1927, late Chichele Professor of Military History at Oxford.⁸⁷

Wilkinson indicated at the outset that he was not interested in challenging Liddell Hart's vision of the future in so far as it concerned the replacement of large conscript armies by smaller highly trained professional forces based upon mechanization. He did challenge Liddell Hart's interpretation of the World War, his reading of Clausewitz and Saxe, his justification of what we know as strategic bombing, and the general view that victory in war was possible on the cheap. Indeed, Wilkinson summed up his criticism of Liddell Hart's essays: "It turns out that he [Liddell Hart] is after that old will o' the wisp, victory without battle or bloodshed."⁸⁸

Liddell Hart had maintained that the cost of the World War obtained from an inflexible pursuit of decisive battle in the main theater of war. Wilkinson pointed out the unpleasant fact that Britain, at least, had not concentrated entirely on the main theater, but had diverted forces to Gallipoli, Mesopotamia, Egypt, Palestine and Macedonia. He claimed that fully one third of all British losses were suffered in secondary theaters. In addition, Wilkinson was critical of the French for failing to concentrate forces at the decisive point in 1914.

Wilkinson argued that Jomini not Clausewitz was the great expositor of Napoleon. He compared Liddell Hart's criticism to the text of On War

and found no real differences between the two except, perhaps, for the emphasis Liddell Hart placed on Clausewitz's discussion of the concept of absolute war. This, Wilkinson pointed out, was an abstract concept of war as it would be if guided solely by pure logic. Wilkinson challenged Liddell Hart's historical examples and, more wounding perhaps, quoted the continuation of Saxe's apparent rejection of battle, a passage in which the great Frenchman said:

I do not pretend to say that when you find a chance of crushing the enemy you ought not to attack him nor take advantage of any false moves he may make; what I mean is that you can make war without leaving anything to chance... when you do give battle you must know how to profit by your victory, and, above all, must not be satisfied with merely remaining master of the field.⁸⁹

Wilkinson challenged Liddell Hart's theory of air bombardment with gas. He challenged its practicability, its economy, its feasibility, and its likelihood of success. He also challenged the morality of attacking a defenseless population to avoid killing soldiers.

In the end, Wilkinson challenged the whole idea of war on the cheap. He noted that invasion by a large army would very likely require a like response or submission. Attack with tanks would not solve the problem because such an attack would be met by the enemy's tanks. In conclusion, Wilkinson wrote that the sacrifices of the last war, while certainly greater than necessary, had their true origin in the value placed by the competing powers on the matters at issue. In the case of the World War these had been perceived to amount to nothing less than national survival.

Wilkinson's interpretation of the World War is only partially satisfying, a correction rather than a refutation. Despite side shows and coalition compromises, there is little evidence to support the proposition that more men would have produced anything but more graves on the Western Front. The flaws in Liddell Hart's argument for strategic bombing have already been discussed and do not merit repetition. Wilkinson's argument that the intensity of war is proportional to the stakes involved diverged from Liddell Hart's thesis on the relationship of ends and means not so much in the general premise as in the specific case of the World War. Liddell Hart's view was conditioned by the outcome. Wilkinson's was the more historically accurate view of the issues as seen by the participants at a time when they could not know the outcome. Liddell Hart would respond that they should have.⁹⁰

Liddell Hart was incorrect in much of his criticism of Clausewitz, as Wilkinson pointed out. Liddell Hart was aware that Clausewitz offered other objectives in war than the enemy army. Indeed, in "The Napoleonic Fallacy" he acknowledged that Clausewitz had pointed to three broad objectives, the armed forces, the country, and the enemy's will.⁹¹ For Liddell Hart, Clausewitz's main failing was his obscurity and the mischief that resulted therefrom.

Liddell Hart's criticism of the German soldier-philosopher tells something about the former's view of the place of the theorist in history. To Liddell Hart a theorist was a heroic figure. This is nowhere made more clear than in the opening sentence of the Prologue to The Ghost of Napoleon: "The influence of thought on thought is the most

influential factor in history."⁹² Because of this, the theorist had a responsibility for the emphasis others placed on his words, and the actions that followed. Critics of Liddell Hart may dismiss his view of the theorist's heroic role as largely self-serving. However, it seems more reasonable to conclude that his actions conformed to his vision rather than the other way round.

That same year, Liddell Hart brought out the second of his histories, Great Captains Unveiled. As has been noted elsewhere, the essays which make up this book had their origin at various times beginning in 1923.⁹³ Four of the five had been published separately. The most important essays are the first two which were written while Liddell Hart was still on active service. The first treats two Mongol commanders, Jenghiz Khan and Sabutai, the second, Marechal De Saxe. The essay on the Mongols provided Liddell Hart with a tactical analogy for combined firepower and mobility developed by precise battle drill. The study of De Saxe gave him his alternative to Clausewitz. The final essay, on Wolfe, is also worthy of some comment. This essay, unlike its companions, was not one of the Blackwoods pieces. Indeed, it appears to have been added to justify the collection. Wolfe's primary qualification for consideration would seem to be that he was British. The essay is noteworthy because it is an early expression of what would become Liddell Hart's fascination with a uniquely 'British Way' in warfare. Altogether the essays are interesting but not particularly remarkable either as history or as theoretical statements. In 1927

Liddell Hart was more interested in the question of the new Experimental Armored Force.

In March, 1926, the Secretary of State for War had announced to Parliament the intention of the Army to form a mechanized force at a large training center for experimental purposes.⁹⁴ On Christmas Eve of that year Fuller was appointed to command the Experimental Force and the 7th Infantry Brigade at Tidworth. A year after the Secretary of State's first announcement there was still no experimental force and Fuller, who had become disenchanted with the bureaucratic arrangements for the force, submitted his resignation. On the 22d of April, 1927, Liddell Hart published an article in the Telegraph titled, "An Army Mystery -- Is There a Mechanized Force." The piece has been called, quite properly, "a masterpiece of journalistic intervention in bureaucratic affairs."⁹⁵ The upshot was that the organization of the Experimental Force got underway albeit without Fuller. Liddell Hart formally retired from the Army in response to what he perceived to be thinly veiled attempts at intimidation in response to his intervention in War Office affairs. His entitlement to half-pay had two years more to run. It is small wonder that he would take a personal interest in the trials and tribulations of the Experimental Force.

The Experimental Mechanized Force was an armored brigade group. It consisted of a medium tank battalion, a light battalion of armored cars and light tanks, a motorized machine gun battalion, an artillery brigade to which was added a light battery, and a field engineer company.⁹⁶ The force was opposed by a variety of foes culminating in a divisional force

reinforced by a cavalry brigade. According to Liddell Hart, a truck-borne infantry battalion was attached to the Mechanized Force at various periods during the trials.⁹⁷

In his analysis of the 1927 maneuvers, published in the R.U.S.I. Journal, Liddell Hart focused on the tactical capabilities of the Mechanized Force.⁹⁸ His view of the success of the exercises is evident in his subtitle, "Conversion by Demonstration". What was demonstrated was the relative superiority of even an imperfectly mechanized force over its muscle powered enemies.

In his observations of the conduct of the trials, Liddell Hart was critical of the force commander for what he saw as unnecessary caution.⁹⁹ Liddell Hart believed that the intrinsic power of the mechanized force would protect it from a dismounted foe in open country and its mobility would permit it to go around any obstacle. He clearly underestimated the threat of infiltrating infantry at night and scoffed at the threat of anti-tank weapons which could, he wrote, be easily overcome by attack with the use of smoke, swift maneuver, and air support.¹⁰⁰ Liddell Hart seems to have been of two minds about the need for air support at this time. He was consistent in his insistence that close air support was essential for armored forces but, in a later article on the 1927 maneuvers, would warn that the strategic mission of the RAF would limit the availability of aircraft for ground support.¹⁰¹

Liddell Hart's tactical model was the Mongol attack in which mounted archers had harassed a dismounted or poorly mounted foe by fire

(Mongols were, according to Liddell Hart, horse archers), refusing close combat until the cohesion of the defense had been destroyed. In the mechanized force, the tasks of disruption-destruction would be performed by the coordinated employment of light and medium tanks against dismounted enemies.¹⁰² Liddell Hart did not dwell on tank versus tank warfare, something he relegated to the future, but he argued such conflict would resemble naval warfare with the difference that the fleet bases or ports would be movable rather than fixed. He reiterated the need for light infantry as land marines, men "so highly trained in the use of cover that [they] can stalk machine-guns, and so highly trained as a shot that [they] can pick off their crews."¹⁰³

One issue was raised that would remain intractable through the Second World War. It was the question of whether tanks were to be divided among the various functions or concentrated for use as a masse de manoeuvre. This is an argument which had its parallel in the use of airpower and continues to have its analogs in our day as modern force designers try to allocate scarce but decisive multifunction tools of war among competing interests. The maneuvers demonstrated to the satisfaction of the army leadership that infantry attacks could not succeed against machine guns without tank support. The resulting decision was that all columns must have tanks attached. This flew in the face of the idea that tanks should be concentrated for the decisive blow. Liddell Hart's view may seem surprising given his own emphasis on the importance of the decisive attack by massed armor. For, while he wrote that: "It is unquestionable that this use [concentrated] for the

decisive blow, ... is the most valuable and the correct one in principle....," he also acknowledged that the decisive blow required "preliminary blows to fix and disorganize the enemy."¹⁰⁴ If these blows were impossible without tanks it would be fruitless to hoard those weapons for later use. Liddell Hart's conclusion was that there were simply too many infantry and too few tanks.

This was not an elegant solution but it does show that Liddell Hart's theoretical views of the sequence of events in the conduct of an attack or battle were consistent, notwithstanding his desire to see tanks form the mass of maneuver so essential to the sublime solution in war. His answer also shows the shallowness of those who portray the problem of tank employment as simply a choice of either in support of infantry, or as a means of exploitation. Infantry would learn to attack machine guns and tanks would become tools of exploitation. But more than one attack during the Second World War would fail because the armor force of exploitation was drawn into the battle of penetration for the same reasons that were in evidence in the 1927 trials.

In 1928 the name of the Experimental Mechanized Force was changed. It was retitled The Armoured Force. Otherwise it remained a fairly ad hoc mechanized brigade group. Liddell Hart's report on the 1928 Armoured Forces maneuvers¹⁰⁵ is indicative of a significant change in his own frame of reference and of the maturation of his theoretical thought. For while he continued to address practical issues of organization and tactical employment, he introduced the idea of indirectness as a governing principle. It was this idea which was to

become his most unique contribution to twentieth century military theory.

Liddell Hart was clearly disappointed in the progress made with the Armoured Force during the first year of its existence. In his view the 1928 maneuvers held few new lessons not obtainable by serious reflection on the 1927 experience. The most significant deductions to be drawn concerned the influence of mobility on military action. This year, however, he was prepared to draw clear distinctions between a merely enhanced mobility and the combination of mobility and armored warfare.

According to Liddell Hart both sets of maneuvers demonstrated the inability of an ordinary division (based on infantry) to deal with a mechanized force in any but a static position. The ability of mechanized units to refuse engagement, and to seize vital points before an infantry division could interfere, rendered old fashioned divisions all but useless. Their basic weakness was not mitigated by attachment of a few armoured units to an infantry base. Liddell Hart referred to the limited relief thus provided as a shift from strategic paralysis to strategic arthritis. The immobile mass simply slowed and limited the mobile attachments.

Liddell Hart drew a distinction between mobility by motorization and the practice of armoured warfare. Motorization was not unbeneficial for, he acknowledged, it multiplied strategic effect to the extent it permitted rapid redeployment of forces. Armored vehicles, however, could extend this mobilization onto the battlefield. Liddell Hart saw a

serious disadvantage in the attempts to mix armored and unarmored vehicles. He argued that all unarmored vehicles should be removed from the Armoured Force which would then consist primarily of the two types of tanks he had promoted earlier, medium gun tanks for a base of fire and light machine gun tanks for maneuver. A few armored cars for scouts was about all you required. Infantry was of questionable value in such a force which could be expected to bypass most obstructions. In fact, Liddell Hart indicated that for the brigade-sized Armoured Force there was more to be gained by attaching a single company of 'land marines' in armoured carriers than an ordinary battalion in unarmored vehicles.¹⁰⁶

The purpose of the Armoured Force, and in future of armored divisions, was "to provide the Commander-in-Chief of our Expeditionary Force with a strategic [operational] thrusting weapon."¹⁰⁷ In the intermediate period, before full mechanization of British and continental forces, there was a need to "sharpen" the capabilities of regular divisions. To this end Liddell Hart recommended more tanks and an increased scale of artillery matched with a reduction of conventional infantry. In the infantry units which remained, armored machine gun carriers were essential to provide the necessary fire support.

These observations were scarcely novel. They were little more than an updated version of the "New Model" Army. What was different was the framework within which the handling of armored forces was discussed. Liddell Hart complained that large unit training emphasized the development of "a smooth-working tactical process" rather than the resurrection of tactical or strategic art. He argued that this

envisioned warfare of the continuous front, similar to 1918 notwithstanding that the necessary forces to maintain such a front existed nowhere. In such an environment the only maneuver was lateral, the attempt by one side or the other to overlap its opponent. This technique was more successful than a direct frontal push but was seldom decisive because, while it might elbow an enemy out of position, it seldom dislocated his organization. This Liddell Hart referred to as "shunting" strategy.¹⁰⁸ What was needed, he wrote, was a return to an appreciation of the divisional system in which armies moved as "widely separated small 'groups', ready to cover long distances, to manoeuvre boldly, and to think strategically."¹⁰⁹ For a force capable of this sort of distributed mobility he offered a new aim, the aim of the great masters of war: "...to get by an indirect approach on the enemy's rear, knowing that once astride his line of communications and retreat he would either be paralysed or unhinged -- in which case his natural tendency would be to fall back in fragments into their embrace."¹¹⁰ The turning movement was thereby reborn as the master stroke of strategy, the key to operational success.

NOTES

Chapter III

1. Adrian Liddell Hart, "Preface" to B. H. Liddell Hart, Why Don't We Learn From History (2d ed., New York: Hawthorn Books, Inc., 1971), p. 7.
2. B. H. Liddell Hart, "The Napoleonic Fallacy; The Moral Objective in War," Empire Review (May, 1925), 510-520.
3. See Robert H. Larson, "B. H. Liddell Hart: Apostle of Limited War," Military Affairs, XLIV (April, 1980), 70-74.
4. 'Bardell', "Study and Reflection v. Practical Experience; A Critical Examination of the Claims of Age, The Professional, and the "Practical" Soldier to Unique Authority on War," Army Quarterly, VI (July, 1923), 318-331.
5. Lieut. Colonel L. V. Bond, "The Tactical Theories of Captain Liddell Hart (A Criticism)," The Royal Engineers Journal, XXXVI (September, 1922), 153-168. Liddell Hart tells us that General Bond was the General Officer Commanding in Malaya up to six months prior to the Japanese invasion. At the time he wrote his rather harsh and unfortunately disjointed criticism of Liddell Hart's ideas he was an instructor in the Senior Officers School in India. Liddell Hart, Memoirs, I, 59.
6. Liddell Hart, "Colonel Bond's Criticisms," pp. 302-303. See also, Liddell Hart, Science of Infantry Tactics, iv. For comparison with Fuller's views on the subject see, J. F. C. Fuller, The Foundation of the Science of War (London: Hutchison & Co., Ltd., 1925), p. 36.
7. Liddell Hart, "Suggestions on the Future Development of the Combat Unit," p. 666.
8. 'Bardell', "Study and Reflection v. Practical Experience," p. 322. Emphasis added.
9. B. H. Liddell Hart, The Remaking of Modern Armies (London: John Murray, 1927), p. 173.
10. Ibid., p. 172.
11. B. H. Liddell Hart, "The New British Doctrine of Mechanized War," English Review, XLIX (December, 1929), 692. Liddell Hart, Memoirs, I, 90. Bond, Liddell Hart: A Study of His Military Thought, 28-32. Luvaas, Education of an Army, pp. 381-383.
12. An example of Fuller's criticism can be seen in the article he wrote to mediate between Lieutenant Colonel Bond and Liddell Hart. In criticizing the "Expanding Torrent System" Fuller wrote: "What do we see here, not the outline of an infantry attack, but that of a tank attack." He admitted that Liddell Hart's system was an improvement over 1914 but he wrote that: "Setting out to bless the infantry, I cannot help feeling that Captain Liddell Hart has ended by cursing them, and by cursing them he has revealed to us all a system of tactics admirably suited for bullet-proof men and only such as these can rightly be called human tanks. He is, in fact, if not in word, a tank enthusiast." Fuller, "Captain Liddell Hart and Lieut. Colonel Bond," p. 62.
13. Liddell Hart, "Colonel Bond's Criticism," and B. H. Liddell Hart, "The British and French Doctrines on Infantry in the Attack; A Comparison of the New Regulations in the Two Countries," The Army Quarterly, IV (July, 1922), 274-286.

14. Liddell Hart, Memoirs, I, 35, 91-92.
15. B. H. Liddell Hart, "The Next Great War," Royal Engineers Journal, XXXVIII (March, 1924), 90-107. B. H. Liddell Hart, "The Development of the 'New Model' Army; Suggestions on a Progressive, But Gradual Mechanicalization," The Army Quarterly, IX (October, 1924), 37-50.
16. Liddell Hart, "The Next Great War," p. 90. Liddell Hart, "Development of the 'New Model' Army," pp. 37-38. Fuller's influence on Liddell Hart's views is evident throughout. 1922 was the year Fuller completed The Reformation of War (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1923).
17. Liddell Hart, "Development of the 'New Model' Army," pp 47-48. Liddell Hart, "The Next Great War," p. 90.
18. Ibid., pp. 90-91.
19. Ibid., p. 107.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
22. Liddell Hart, "Development of the 'New Model' Army," p. 43.
23. Ibid., p. 38.
24. Ibid., p. 44.
25. Ibid., p. 48.
26. Ibid., p. 50.
27. Fuller, "Captain Liddell Hart and Lieut. Colonel Bond," p. 62.
28. Liddell Hart, "The Next Great War," p. 98.
29. Liddell Hart, Memoirs, I, 64, 66-67.
30. B. H. Liddell Hart, "The Napoleonic Fallacy; The Moral Objective in War," Empire Review (May, 1925), 510-520. For the date of composition see Liddell Hart, Memoirs, I, 75.
31. J. F. C. Fuller, The Reformation of War (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1923), pp. 29-30.
32. Liddell Hart, "Colonel Bond's Criticism," p. 308.
33. See above page 32.
34. Liddell Hart, "The Napoleonic Fallacy," p. 511.
35. Ibid.. Emphasis added.
36. Ibid.

37. Ibid.

38. Ibid., p. 518.

39. Liddell Hart did qualify his predictions for airpower in his subsequent book, Paris; Or the Future of War. He pointed out that they pertained only to countries with a superior airforce which was opposed by a state which offered a centralized strategic objective. He noted the possibility of mutual deterrence where such conditions did not obtain. In his later editions of The Decisive Wars of History, he would admit that even so, his expectations for strategic airpower were unrealistic. B. H. Liddell Hart, Paris; Or the Future of War (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd, 1925), pp. 60-61. B. H. Liddell Hart, Strategy (New York: Praeger, 1967), 551.

40. Liddell Hart, "The Napoleonic Fallacy", p. 520.

41. B. H. Liddell Hart, Paris, p. 9.

42. Ibid., p. 27.

43. Ibid., p. 36.

44. Ibid., p. 27.

45. Ibid., p. 61.

46. Ibid., pp. 68-69.

47. Although he never says so in so many words in Paris, this is the clear thrust of his arguments. What he does say explicitly is: "...organizers of armies will pin their faith on quality instead of quantity...." "Not 'how large,' but 'how good' will be the standard of to-morrow." Ibid., p. 88.

48. Ibid., p. 79.

49. Review of Paris; Or The Future of War in The Times Literary Supplement, October 8, 1925, p. 658.

50. B. H. Liddell Hart, The Decisive Wars of History (London: Little, Brown, and Company, 1929). Published in London by G. Bell and Sons.

51. B. H. Liddell Hart, The Remaking of Modern Armies (London: John Murray, 1927).

52. Liddell Hart, Memoirs, I, 76.

53. B. H. Liddell Hart, A Greater Than Napoleon; Scipio Africanus (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1927). Originally published by Blackwood in 1926.

54. B. H. Liddell Hart, Great Captains Unveiled (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1927).

55. Jenghiz Khan, Sabutai, Marshal de Saxe, Gustavus Adolphus, Wallenstein, and Wolfe.

56. B. H. Liddell Hart, Reputations (London: John Murray, 1928).

57. B. H. Liddell Hart, Sherman: Soldier, Realist, American (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1958) a reissue of the 1933 printing. The work was first published in 1929 by Eyre & Spottiswoode.

58. See above pp. 29-30.

59. Harold R. Winton, "General Sir John Burnett-Stuart and British Military Reform, 1927-1938" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford University, 1977), p. 57 et seq. B. H. Liddell Hart, "Army Maneuvers, 1925", Journal of the Royal United Service Institution, LXX (November, 1925), 647-655.

60. Ibid., p. 647. Godley mounted an infantry brigade in lorries but dismounted them 10 miles from their line of departure thus largely negating the effect. Chetwode sent his one tank battalion on a thirty five mile sweep around the enemy flank but his infantry failed to fix the defender and the blow fell in the air.

61. Ibid., pp. 650-651

62. Ibid., p. 652.

63. Ibid., p. 654.

64. Ibid., p. 655.

65. Liddell Hart, A Greater Than Napoleon, p. 43.

66. Ibid., p. 63. Du fort au faible, from strength against weakness. 1927 seems to have been Liddell Hart's French period. This term appears frequently.

67. Ibid., pp. 255-257.

68. Ibid., p. 271.

69. Liddell Hart, Remaking of Modern Armies, p. v.

70. For "Study and Reflection v. Practical Experience", see above, p. 27.

71. Liddell Hart, Memoirs, I, 109.

72. Liddell Hart, Remaking of Modern Armies, p.3.

73. Ibid., p. 4.

74. Ibid., p. 9.

75. Ibid., p. 17.

76. Ibid., pp. 19-21.

77. Ibid., p. 26.

78. Ibid., pp. 9, 16, 118. Machineguns were not infantry weapons during the World War but belonged to a separate corps. Lewis guns were considered 'light automatics'.

79. Ibid., p. 59.
80. Ibid., pp. 44-45. Emphasis added.
81. Ibid., "The Rival Theories of Disarmament", pp. 235-240; "The Post-War Doctrines of Germany and France", pp. 211-234. There are four additional chapters which critique the French army of 1926.
82. Ibid., pp. 220-221.
83. Ibid., 233.
84. Ibid., p. 171. Emphasis added.
85. Liddell Hart, "The Napoleonic Fallacy," p.512.
86. Quoted in Ibid., p. 514; in Liddell Hart, Remaking of Modern Armies, p. 96. Emphasis in original.
87. Spenser Wilkinson, "Killing No Murder: An Examination of Some New Theories of War," Army Quarterly, XV (October, 1927), 14-27.
88. Ibid., p. 15.
89. Quoted in Ibid., p. 23. See Liddell Hart's comments on the same subject in B. H. Liddell Hart, The British Way in Warfare (London: Faber and Faber, Ltd., 1932), p. 17.
90. Liddell Hart, Thoughts on War, pp. 27, 103.
91. Carl von Clausewitz, On War, ed. and trans. by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), p. 90. Paraphrased by Liddell Hart in Remaking of Modern Armies, p. 93. Presumably Liddell Hart used the Graham translation of Clausewitz.
92. B. H. Liddell Hart, The Ghost of Napoleon (New Haven: Yale University Press, [1933]), p. 11.
93. Liddell Hart, Memoirs, I, 74.
94. Winton, "Sir John Burnett-Stuart", p. 103.
95. Ibid. p. 118. Winton's account of the bureaucratic wrangling over the Mechanized Force is the most complete account available. Liddell Hart's account is in Liddell Hart, Memoirs, I, 112 et seq.
96. Winton, "Sir John Burnett-Stuart", p. 120.
97. Liddell Hart, Memoirs, I, 124.
98. B. H. Liddell Hart, "Army Training, 1927; Conversion by Demonstration," Journal of the Royal United Service Institution, LXXII (November, 1927), 746-754.
99. Ibid., p. 748.

100. Ibid., p. 751.
101. B. H. Liddell Hart, "1927 - Or - 527?", Journal of the Royal United Service Institution, LXXIII (May, 1928), 269.
102. Liddell Hart, Great Captains Unveiled, p. 10. Liddell Hart, "Army Training, 1927," pp. 751-752.
103. Ibid., p. 753.
104. Ibid., p. 748.
105. B. H. Liddell Hart, "Armoured Forces in 1928," Journal of the Royal United Service Institution, LXXIII (November, 1928), 720-729.
106. Ibid., p. 723.
107. Ibid.
108. Ibid., p. 725.
109. Ibid., p. 726.
110. Ibid.

CHAPTER IV

Consolidation and Maturity

The [body] count doesn't mean anything. Where you strike the enemy does. By skillfully selecting objectives, you can throw him off balance so that he can't pick himself back up. You can destroy him by attacking his command and control or his logistic lifeline. You cannot destroy him by attrition.¹

LtCol Michael D. Wyly, U.S.M.C.

The years 1928 to 1933 constitute the period of consolidation or maturity for the theoretical development of B. H. Liddell Hart. The books which are the legacy of this period, The Decisive Wars of History, Sherman: Soldier, Realist, American, The British Way in Warfare,² The Ghost of Napoleon, and The Future of Infantry³ tie together the ideas that evolved in the twenties and present them as a comprehensive set of interrelated concepts. During the same years Liddell Hart continued his examination of the World War with The Real War: 1914-1918,⁴ and Foch: The Man of Orleans.⁵

In 1928 Liddell Hart drew his maturing thoughts on war together in a book titled The Decisive Wars of History. It is probably the best known of all his works. It was expanded and reprinted in 1954 and again in 1967 under the title Strategy.⁶ It is still in print. The book represents Liddell Hart's divergence from the line of thought carved out by J. F. C. Fuller and his coming to terms with the logical implications of the ideas he expressed in "The Napoleonic Fallacy" and, indeed, as far back as his 1920 article "The Essential Principles of War".⁷

The fundamental principle that ties this to his previous works is Liddell Hart's belief that an enemy could not be defeated decisively unless or until the internal cohesion of his position, force, or nation, was first undone. He wrote that, "while the strength of an enemy country lies outwardly in its numbers and resources, these are fundamentally dependent upon stability 'or equilibrium' of control, morale, and supply."⁸ From his study of history, he concluded that "throughout the ages decisive results in war have only been reached when the approach has been indirect."⁹ That is to say, to land a decisive blow one had to strike along the line of least resistance and least expectation.¹⁰ This, in its simplest terms, is the doctrine of the indirect approach.

The Decisive Wars of History began with a hasty survey of warfare from the ancients through the 19th Century. Liddell Hart acknowledged in his Preface that his survey would be too superficial for some readers, but he emphasized that the book was "intended as a guide in historical study rather than as a compendium of history."¹¹ From his survey of twenty-seven wars and 240 campaigns, he determined that in only six had the commander gained "a decisive result by a direct strategic approach to the main army of the enemy."¹² He drew a further conclusion that "...the consistently successful great commanders of history [he excepted Alexander], when faced by an enemy in a position strong naturally or materially, have hardly ever attacked it directly."¹³ Indeed, he argued they have been willing to take on the most hazardous natural obstacles rather than risk a stalemate consequent

to direct confrontation with the living and therefore less predictable will of an enemy. "Natural hazards," he wrote, "however formidable, are inherently less dangerous and less uncertain than fighting hazards. All conditions are more calculable, all obstacles more surmountable, than those of human resistance."¹⁴ The tactical and strategic (operational) techniques most great commanders employed were what Liddell Hart called a "strategy of elastic defence," a calculated withdrawal and counterattack; and the strategic offensive combined with a tactical defense. Both he characterized with the word "lure".¹⁵ From these conclusions, Liddell Hart postulated two maxims:

The first is that ... no general is justified in launching his troops to a direct attack upon an enemy firmly in position.

The second, that instead of seeking to upset the enemy's equilibrium by one's attack, it must be upset before a real attack is or can be successfully launched.¹⁶

He offered two additional hypotheses which are best treated separately. One holds that the 'indirect approach' of great commanders has ordinarily been "a logistical military move directed against an economic target -- the source of supply of either the opposing state or army."¹⁷ The other hypothesis suggests that when fighting a coalition, it is "more fruitful" to overthrow the weaker members than attacking the stronger."¹⁸ The term "logistical move" is a Jominian use of the term logistics and refers not to supply per se, but to "the factors of time, space, and communications."¹⁹ It is, in short, war on the map. It is interesting to note that, in the later revision, Strategy, Liddell Hart would add to the selection of economic targets the idea of attacking a

target purely "psychological in aim". He would argue that what was important in either case was not the nature of the objective, but the effort of the effort on the enemy's equilibrium. Interestingly enough, he did not strengthen the hypothesis about striking a coalition by attacking the weaker partners,²⁰ although that view was not unimportant to his criticism of the 'westerners' in the World War and, indeed, to the subsequent idea of a British way in warfare.²¹

Consequent to his discussion of his conclusions from history, Liddell Hart set himself the task of constructing a new framework of strategic thought. He began with an examination of the definition of strategy. He rejected that of Clausewitz, "...the employment of battles as a means to gain the object of war" because, in his view, it intruded on policy and it accepted as given the necessity of battle.²² He was more approving of Moltke's definition, "...the practical adaptation of the means placed at a general's disposal to the attainment of the object in view."²³ Liddell Hart refined Moltke's definition and defined strategy as "...the distribution and transmission of military means to fulfill the ends of policy".²⁴ Tactics he limited to matters concerned with fighting; grand strategy, to the coordination and direction of all the resources of the nation to the attainment of the political object of the war.²⁵

Liddell Hart's definition of strategy includes, but is not limited to, those actions which have recently been gathered by the U. S. Army under the definition of operational art. In practical terms, however, there is little of substance to distinguish between them except for the

the limits set on the latter. Operational art is directed to the attainment of strategic goals in a theater through the design, organization, and conduct of campaigns and major operations.²⁶ Clearly the same may be said of Liddell Hart's strategy, though the actions included do not share the geographic qualification of a single theater.

Liddell Hart answered Wilkinson's criticism about seeking "victory without battle or bloodshed"²⁷ in a discussion of the aim of strategy. He pointed out that a clear purpose of strategy was to bring about battle on the best terms possible. Clearly then, perfection of strategy would obviate the need to fight at all. This being the case, not battle but "dislocation is the aim of strategy; its sequel may either be the enemy's dissolution or his disruption in battle."²⁸ How was this to be accomplished? Through movement and surprise. Success as a strategist was measured by "a sound calculation and coordination of the end and the means," in short, "a perfect economy of force."²⁹

Liddell Hart distinguished between strategic dislocation in the physical or "logistical" sphere and psychological dislocation, although he admitted either or both were often the consequence of the same actions. Physical dislocation was the result of actions which upset the enemy's dispositions by requiring a sudden change of front, movements which separated his forces, endangered his supplies or threatened his route of withdrawal. Psychological dislocation, which could result from the same actions, was derived from inspiring in the enemy "a sense of being trapped."³⁰ All of these effects could be produced by a move into the enemy's rear.

In the "Napoleonic Fallacy," Liddell Hart mitigated his criticism of Foch and Clausewitz by observing that the distortions of their theories by their followers was a consequence of the human instinct to substitute the repetition of slogans for thought.³¹ To a great extent Liddell Hart has fallen prey to the same phenomenon. The words 'indirect approach' or 'indirectness' have become terms with metaphysical properties, for some words with which to conjure.³² Liddell Hart himself elevated the concept to a transcendental philosophy of life.³³ This is unfortunate, for the universal meaning the term has acquired has concealed the practical lesson it was coined to encapsulate. Contemporary readers tend to forget the warning of the Preface to The Decisive Wars of History, that the work was not intended as a substitute for study but as a guide.

The concept of the indirect approach should be viewed as a sort of marketing technique, a conceptual umbrella, that drew together a number of ideas with which Liddell Hart had been toying for sometime. These were the governing law of economy of force, the idea of the converging attack - fixing and maneuver, the necessity to sequence disruption and destruction, and the idea of a moral attack sought through, or even independently of, physical dislocation. All of these ideas were products of Liddell Hart's attempts to discover, through study and reflection, a cheaper and more efficient way to fight wars. In his memoirs, Liddell Hart makes clear the relationship between the indirect approach and his arguments for mechanization, particularly the importance of speed of execution as the product of mobility.³⁴

There are, of course, some criticisms which should be acknowledged. Like Paris, indeed like most theoretical works, the ideas are essentially one sided. War is multisided. While one is seeking an indirect approach to one's enemy, one may be reasonably sure that the enemy is seeking an equally indirect approach to oneself. Liddell Hart noted that indirect approaches had normally been adopted only as a last resort or a gamble.³⁵ This he dismissed by implication as an error by the great commanders. It seems a more logical interpretation would have to do with the risk and difficulty normally involved in most such attempts. Surely an analogy is the last minute sixty-yard pass in an American football game. It is capable of reversing one's fortunes but too great a risk for use in the opening minutes. Not surprisingly, it is the side with the least to lose that normally resorts to the technique. It is fair to say that Liddell Hart discounted the importance of the commander himself, of his insight which recognized both the need and possibility of the indirect approach, and of his strength of character and will to carry it to a successful conclusion.

The Decisive Wars of History is important because it represents Liddell Hart's striking out from what generally had been a discipleship to J. F. C. Fuller. There had always been some divergence, particularly in Liddell Hart's consistent belief in the continued efficacy of infantry, but the idea of strategy as a means to obviate the need for battle was a clear departure from Fuller's 'grand tactical' views.³⁶ In Liddell Hart's case, the interest in strategy would soon expand to considerations of national military policy. He would spend most of the

thirties focusing on matters more political than professional. First, however, he would round out the issues raised by The Decisive Wars in one of his best historical studies, a biography of William Tecumseh Sherman.

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At the same time he was writing The Decisive Wars of History, Liddell Hart began a biography of William Tecumseh Sherman. Sherman was, or became for Liddell Hart, the embodiment of the indirect approach. The book is very likely the best researched of Liddell Hart's histories. It is based on research into the published documents as well as a substantial bibliography of secondary works. Unlike some of Liddell Hart's other histories which tended simply to retail his ideas, the writing of Sherman extended and broadened the concepts developed in The Decisive Wars of History. It is therefore inextricably bound up in the evolution of Liddell Hart's theory of war. All of this is not to say that, in Sherman, Liddell Hart succeeded in keeping his theory from guiding his history. While many of his insights and interpretations are undeniably brilliant, others would, no doubt, be of concern to professional historians.

Gallons of ink have been spilt over the relationship of the eastern and western theaters in the War Between the States. In this debate, Liddell Hart was an avowed 'westerner'. That is to say, he believed that the West was the decisive theater of the war. Meade, in the East, had the economy of force role, fixing the most dangerous Confederate

Army. Sherman made the decisive attack, first to Atlanta, then to the sea and north through the Carolinas. Generally, Liddell Hart did not address the uniqueness of the extent of territory and the North's material superiority that made possible a concentric attack on the Confederate States by two armies, each superior to the forces against which it was arrayed. Similarly he did not assess the role played in Confederate operational success by tactical ineptness on the part of Union commanders.

For Liddell Hart, Sherman's attack was indirect because it struck not at the enemy's main army, but at his moral and psychological center. By his uninterrupted progress, Sherman destroyed the enemy's will to war.³⁷ Operationally the approach was direct, straight down the railroad to Atlanta. This Liddell Hart accepted as a necessity of the times and conditions. But he argued that this directness was mitigated by Sherman's successive flanking maneuvers and his success around Atlanta in drawing John Bell Hood into attacking him while he employed hasty fortifications to enhance his defensive superiority.³⁸

What made Sherman great was his awareness that, in the war of nations, it was the popular will, the moral target, which constituted the strength of the enemy state. This was attacked most efficiently through the disruption of the enemy's social and economic life. For Liddell Hart, it was the psychological effect of this attack, more than the destruction of the army, which led an enemy to sue for peace. Liddell Hart quoted a telegram in which Sherman told Grant, with regard to the proposed 'March to the Sea,' that its purpose was to demonstrate

the inability of the Confederate forces to safeguard the territory over which they claimed sovereignty. "This," he wrote, "may not be war, but rather statesmanship."³⁹ Liddell Hart summed up approvingly, that the campaign demonstrated "that the strength of an armed nation depends on the morale of its citizens -- that if this crumbles the resistance of their armies will also crumble, as an inevitable sequel."⁴⁰

In The Decisive Wars of History, Liddell Hart had argued that the function of strategy was to minimize the need for battle. In writing Sherman, he found confirmation both conceptual and practical. In addition, he expanded his view on the means for carrying out an attack along the lines of least resistance and least expectation. Specifically, he argued for a wide advance by self-sufficient units threatening multiple objectives. He discriminated between the close envelopment and the deeper turning movement, and he reinforced his earlier discussion of the 'luring' attack and defense with his discussions of Sherman's campaign to seize Atlanta.⁴¹

In criticizing the direct approaches of the Army of the Potomac on Lee's army, Liddell Hart asked why this solution, which seemed the more efficient, was unsuccessful. He answered that such an attack rolled an enemy back on his resources thus consolidating his strength. He argued that empirical evidence indicated that such an attack seldom succeeded and the cost of failure "merely weakens the attacker and fortifies the defender."⁴²

According to Liddell Hart, the function of the strategist was not merely to set up a battle between the main forces of the belligerents, but to minimize the consequent fighting by unsettling the balance of the enemy.⁴³ In Sherman he was particularly interested in the moral or psychological balance of an opposing commander for, as he wrote in his Preface, "the issue of any operation of war is decided not by what the situation actually is, but by what the rival commanders think it is."⁴⁴ To achieve the psychological dislocation of the enemy commander he offered two ideas drawn from the study of Sherman's campaigns. The first was the advance on a broad front by major units. The second was a deceptiveness of direction created by the threat posed to alternate objectives.

Liddell Hart compared Sherman's use of his major subordinate units with Napoleon's corps system. Napoleon, he argued, had been misunderstood by his intellectual heirs. This was shown by their belief in a concentrated approach to battle. He called the movement of Napoleon's corps a snare, or a net, and attributed the ascribed error to a misunderstanding of two French words, reuni, which Napoleon used, as compared to concentre.⁴⁵ The difference was that between a coordinated or consolidated movement of units. It was concentration in time rather than space, with all forces retained within supporting distance. Liddell Hart's position was an argument for concentration on the battlefield which, though he did not allude to it, the Prussians had adopted in the Wars of German Unification.

The effect of an attack on a broad front was the confusion of the enemy who was thus unable to concentrate in defense of any single objective, a result of "the incalculable direction of advance."⁴⁶ Liddell Hart saw evidence of this in Grant's maneuvers south of Vicksburg and Sherman's movements through the South.⁴⁷ Taken further, the way to achieve an advance along the lines of least expectation and consequently, least resistance, would seem, therefore, to be to advance in such a manner as to threaten two (or more) objectives.⁴⁸ This placed an enemy on "the horns of a dilemma," for if he defended one, he might lose the other. Likewise, the attacker who could choose a line of advance to a pair of objectives with this sort of ambiguity, could well end by taking both.

The war in the West was full of such dualities. Some like Grant's march threatening Jackson and Vicksburg were the creation of a single army. Others were the result of Union superiority, the effect of the coordinated action of two armies, for example Thomas's in Nashville and Sherman's marching to the sea. Liddell Hart even saw a psychological dilemma imposed on the Confederate soldier by the conflicting demands of national and family loyalties, when the Union Army was loosed on the Confederate rear. In a larger sense, Meade's and Sherman's concurrent campaigns produced a similar dilemma for the Confederates at the strategic level. Thus the idea of alternate objectives, arising from the movement on a broad front of a single army became an independent military principle applicable at the operational and strategic levels.

Eventually of course, armies come into proximity of each other and some sort of battle results. In Sherman, Liddell Hart discussed the relative merits of the deep envelopment or turning movement, and the flank or rear attack. The war in the East provided examples of the latter. Liddell Hart noted that the Chancellorsville campaign was in fact a rear attack but, he said, it was too shallow and permitted Lee to use his central position to confound the effort.⁴⁹ He made no mention of Hooker's tactical ineptness which would seem as critical a factor in the outcome as Lee's actions. Grant's advance through the Wilderness was also criticized as "outflanking rather than rear bestriding."⁵⁰ These compared unfavorably with Sherman's campaigns.

Liddell Hart believed history held the lesson "that the object of the rear attack is not itself to crush the enemy but to unhinge his morale and dispositions so that his dislocation renders the subsequent delivery of a decisive blow both practicable and easy."⁵¹ He clearly felt it was the deep attack that best accomplished this end, although in the case of the Battle of Missionary Ridge, he demonstrated that such psychological dislocation was possible as a result of a tactical flanking attack.⁵² He believed Sherman demonstrated the superiority of the deep attack in his successive attempts at turning movements on the road to Atlanta and, in cutting the rail lines serving Atlanta to draw the Confederate Army out into a battle on his own terms. Sherman confirmed Liddell Hart's view of strategy when he observed of his capture of Atlanta that he had captured the city "as much by strategy as by force."⁵³ Still, the book does contain an implicit warning against

too much subtlety in presentation of the tactical lure. For Liddell Hart also observed that at least one of Sherman's attempts to draw Hood into a tactical disadvantage failed due to Hood's inability to understand the bait!⁵⁴

Most of Liddell Hart's interwar criticism of generalship is negative. In contrast, his treatment of Sherman provides the reader a view of what the theorist thought the modern general should be. Liddell Hart attributed to Sherman two characteristics of transcendent importance. The first was a dispassionate and rational mind. The second was a complete mastery of the business of war. Liddell Hart wrote of Sherman that: "No man of action has more completely attained the point of view of the scientific historian, who observes the movements of mankind with the same detachment as a bacteriologist observes bacilli under a microscope and yet with a sympathy that springs from his own common manhood."⁵⁵ It was this rational and dispassionate point of view that led Sherman to his vision of modern war, harsh in execution and forgiving in resolution. At another level, it enabled him to discern the effects on tactics of changes in technology and, more importantly, to draw the appropriate conclusions about the changed place of the tactical event, or battle, in the operational or strategic schema. It was, after all, the unlikelihood of the decisive battle that made the conduct of Sherman's campaigns so important.

Understanding, of course, is not the same as the power of execution. Liddell Hart was careful to point out that Sherman's was a "calculated audacity and unexpectedness,"⁵⁶ calculated because the

general possessed an "unrivalled knowledge of the conditions of topography, transportation, and supply." "More than any other commander," Liddell Hart wrote, "he knew what he was aiming at and his capacity to attain it."⁵⁷ It was this capability that was the real security of Sherman's movements and which underpinned his decisions at various times to reduce his impedimenta to the extent of moving from Atlanta to the sea independent of a line of communications.

Today, the most unsettling part of Sherman is the ringing indorsement that Liddell Hart gave Sherman's deliberate campaign against the people of the South.⁵⁸ Sherman leaves little doubt about the lengths to which Liddell Hart felt one state might go to impose a peace on another. In the case of Sherman's campaign through the South, he justified the means by the quality of the peace and prosperity that resulted.

Interestingly enough, when the Civil War Centennial edition of Sherman's Memoirs was published, Liddell Hart wrote the introduction.⁵⁹ He summarized the nature of the War Between the States and Sherman's campaigns. He also attributed to his studies of Sherman a strong influence on the evolution of his own theories, particularly the value of unexpectedness as a guarantee of security, the value of flexibility, of alternative objectives, of the 'baited' gambit or 'luring' attack. and, finally, the need to cut down equipment and impedimenta to develop mobility and flexibility.⁶⁰ He admitted that Sherman's strategy in Georgia and the Carolinas was the precursor of the strategic bombing campaign in the Second World War. This failed, he wrote, because the

effect was too slow to develop to attain the decisive effect. Moreover, the people whose collective will was the object of such attacks, had no way to surrender to an attacker who remained in the sky. A closer parallel, he said, was the German Blitzkrieg in 1940.⁶¹

That of course begs the question. What one finds disconcerting about Sherman's campaign; and indeed his proclaimed object, is the same thing one finds worrisome about Liddell Hart's recommendations for the use of the strategic air weapon. That is the apparent contradiction between the blurring of the distinction made, at least in theory, between combat against combatants and noncombatants, and the author's expressed wish to minimize the cost of war to all parties thereby to avoid sowing in one war the seeds of the next. The answer in the case of Sherman lies in the nature of the war itself. The American Civil War was a conflict in which the goals of the combatants were bipolar and extreme. There was no way to resolve the South's desire for independence with the North's desire for Union. Both parties were determined to fight for their position. Given that, the quickest resolution was the most humane. The justification of Sherman's methods rests in the extent to which one credits them with leading to that end. Liddell Hart, whose consistent aim was to reduce the total cost of war, clearly believed they did so. He did not anticipate in Sherman a situation in which both sides to an argument had the capability to wreak havoc on the civil population of the other. It is this failure to appreciate the implications of the imbalance of capabilities between North and South which is the greatest flaw in the use of Sherman as a

theoretical tract. It is the failure to consider context that is the weakness of the inductive method in general.

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The two volumes of Liddell Hart's Memoirs deal only with the years prior to World War II. From the standpoint of his theoretical development, the first volume is the more important. The second addresses his involvement in the corridors of power during the thirties. This change of focus in his activities was reflected in his writings which, beginning with a 1931 lecture titled "Economic Pressure or Continental Victories," argued increasingly for a national military policy of limited continental involvement in any future war. There was a decided shift in his writings from inquiry into military theory to argument for a particular line of military and foreign policy. In short, Liddell Hart's attention had shifted decisively from theory with an admixture of praxis, to a theory-based praxis. The theorist became the prophet and suffered accordingly when his prophecies were overtaken by events in 1940.

In the first volume of his Memoirs, the year 1932 occupies a crowning position. He wrote, "Looking back now, some thirty years later, I have come to realise that 1932 was one of my most variedly conceptive and productive years...."⁶² The list of activities for that year is impressive. It includes advising, ex officio but no less effectively, a War Office Committee on the lessons of World War I and the British delegation to the 1932 Geneva Disarmament Conference,

suggesting a variety of reforms for the infantry arm, urging fresh developments in the use and technique of armored forces, suggesting a reorientation of British strategy, and finally, delivering a series of lectures on what he characterized as military philosophy. The main published artifacts from this period are three books, The British Way in Warfare, The Future of Infantry, and The Ghost of Napoleon. This consideration of Liddell Hart's theoretical edifice will conclude with these works which, in a very real sense, mark his maturity as a theorist.

Like the Remaking of Modern Armies, The British Way in Warfare is a collection of previously published essays. Four have a special significance. These are the theme piece, a revision or updating of the author's conclusions about strategy from The Decisive Wars of History, a short selection of precepts evolved from The Decisive Wars and Sherman, and an article on the impact of technology on warfare which was published originally in The Yale Review.

In January, 1931, only ten months short of ten years after his lecture on the 'Man-in-the-Dark' Theory of Infantry Tactics, Liddell Hart had again addressed The Royal United Service Institution. This time his subject was the military policy of Great Britain. The title of his talk was "Economic Pressure or Continental Victories."⁶³ The idea which the paper presented, an outgrowth of the theory of the indirect approach, was that of a uniquely British way in warfare. This idea and its derivatives would dominate Liddell Hart's writings during the thirties as he struggled against the events which led inevitably to

Britain's major role in the second continental war of the first half of the twentieth century.⁶⁴ This lecture became the theme piece of The British Way in Warfare.

Liddell Hart attributed the source of his thoughts about the existence of a traditional British strategy to a study of World War I made in conjunction with an extensive study of war in general. He had published his classic history of the World War, The Real War, in 1930. He would publish a less successful biography of Foch in 1932. The World War, Liddell Hart wrote, had exhausted the British nation. It had done so because of the adoption of a policy of absolute victory underwritten by a vast continental army. Both, he argued, were departures from Britain's historic policy. This tragic departure he laid at the feet of Clausewitz, out of Foch; specifically three ideas which he proceeded to attack, the theory of absolute warfare, the idea of concentration against the main enemy, and the theory that the armed forces are the true military objective and battle the sole means thereto.⁶⁵ These were not new arguments, with the exception that, now clearly influenced by Spencer Wilkinson's The Rise of General Bonaparte,⁶⁶ he argued against his earlier proposition that Napoleon had always practiced the direct strategic approach. He now distinguished between Bonaparte's earlier, and Napoleon's later, campaigns.

Liddell Hart quoted Sir John Seeley's somewhat Anglocentric view that all of Napoleon's conquests were a consequence of his determination to bring Britain down by cutting her off from continental Europe.⁶⁷ This, in Liddell Hart's view, was striking strength through weakness, an

economic indirect approach in the absence of a direct military path. This, he argued, was Britain's historic strategy as well, the use of naval and economic power on the periphery, in conjunction with underwriting the military endeavors of continental allies, to strike at continental enemies. He provided a summary of three hundred years of British history to demonstrate that this was so.

A thorough criticism of the idea of a 'British way' in warfare is beyond the scope of an examination of the operational thought of Liddell Hart. In any event, that has been provided by Professor Michael Howard, one whose respect and affection for Liddell Hart personally cannot be in doubt.⁶⁸ Howard's criticism took the line that Liddell Hart's theory was flawed because his historical summary was devoid of specific context and conditions. War is a phenomenon largely a creature of both. Britain could pursue a policy of "lending sovereigns to sovereigns"⁶⁹ because of the relative strengths of the continental players, their general satisfaction with the existing balance of power, and the dependence of her enemies on overseas commerce. What was true of the balance of power during the sixteenth through nineteenth centuries was no longer true in the twentieth. Against a true continental state, determined to overthrow the status quo, with almost overwhelming power vis a vis Britain's allies, Britain could choose only participation in resistance, or acquiescence in single power domination of the continent.

If the historically derived policy prescription was flawed, however, it was consistent in its basic premise with Liddell Hart's earlier work. The governing principle was the idea that, "Victory, in a

true sense, surely implies that one is better off after the war than if one had not made war."⁷⁰ "Victory", he wrote, "is only possible if the result is quickly gained or the effort is economically proportional to the national resources."⁷¹ This proportionality was to be achieved when diplomacy, or negotiation, and economic pressures went hand in hand with military action. The difficulty was that conditions and circumstances determine the relative value of each means. Moreover, proportionality with resources must be measured in light of the cost of surrender. These are the points missed by Liddell Hart in his discovery of the 'British Way' in warfare. Unfortunately for Liddell Hart's reputation, Hitler's Germany would prove remarkably resistant to either diplomacy or economic pressure, and it would demand resistance notwithstanding apparent disproportionality to the national purse.

Although the Foreword to The British Way in Warfare gives as its purpose "to show that there has been a distinctively British practice of war,"⁷² that point is carried almost entirely by the opening chapter. Even the Foreword gives more precedence to the fifth chapter, a revision of the chapter on strategy (Ch X, "Construction") from The Decisive Wars of History, here titled "Strategy Re-framed." There were a total of sixteen loosely related essays, five of which were deleted when the book was revised and reissued three years later as When Britain Goes to War.⁷³

The structure of the book would imply that the first five chapters were intended to support the proposition that there was a 'British Way' in warfare. The fact that three of these essays were among those

deleted three years later is probably indicative of the haste with which the book was put together. These three short lived pieces included an essay in defense of military critics which shows that Liddell Hart's sensitivity and desire for personal recognition was not met by his growing prominence as a journalist, a defense of General Gallieni's claim to have been the victor of the Marne, and a piece very similar to the conclusion of Sherman that argued Europeans had ignored the lessons of the one war which most clearly foreshadowed the events of 1914-'18.

The contribution of these three essays to the central issue was limited although all three were excellent in their own right. The piece on criticism warned against the hardening of doctrine into a 'true faith' the critics of which become heretics. The essay on the Marne is an excellent treatment of the art of historical inquiry and the use of conflicting evidence. Aside from restating his praise of Sherman, Liddell Hart made two main points in his essay on the American Civil War. The first was that short wars among advanced states were increasingly unlikely unless one side was either incompetent or unprepared. The second point was that, as a consequence, modern military power relied more than ever on its economic foundations. The economic targets of a modern state were more decisive, more numerous, and more vulnerable to attack than heretofore.

The argument for the precedence of the economic target in war was brought to a conclusion by the fifth chapter, a revised version of the discussion of strategy from The Decisive Wars of History. The revision consisted of the addition of several ideas, some of which dated back as

far as 1921. The first was the old idea of economy of force. In strategy this was to guide a commander's distribution of his forces. "An army," Liddell Hart wrote, "should always be so distributed that its parts can aid each other and combine to produce the maximum possible concentration of force at one place, while the minimum force necessary is used everywhere to prepare the success of the concentration."⁷⁴ The distraction of the latter, he argued, was essential to the success of the former. Its purpose was to insure that the point of attack could not be reinforced in time to deny success to the attacker. This principle, now elevated to strategy, had first been articulated in Liddell Hart's early discussion of infantry tactics.⁷⁵ Its reappearance is further evidence of the author's belief that the principles of war were applicable across the levels of activity in war.

The basis of strategy, Liddell Hart went on, lay in balancing the conflicting demands of concentration to hit, and dispersal to make the enemy disperse. The resolution of this apparent contradiction lay in the approach which threatened alternate objectives. Such an advance was first of all a means of distraction. Secondly, it ensured flexibility for one's own plan by providing alternate paths or branches to success. To conduct such an approach required a revitalization of the divisional system, "a calculated dispersion of force for a concentrated purpose."⁷⁶ Surprise was increasingly important as the battlefield became more lethal. The World War had demonstrated conclusively that surprise was essential for breaking a line, and mechanics for expanding

the opening and maintaining the speed and continuity of advance in exploitation.⁷⁷

Liddell Hart concluded his discussion of strategy by observing that overthrow of the enemy's force might still be the quickest and most effective way to cause the collapse of an enemy's will to resist. But he made it clear that he doubted such an outcome was obtainable. The economic target, now open to attack from the air, provided the alternative means to bring about a settlement and "an additional lever towards [one's] military aim."⁷⁸

From the standpoint of operational theory, the most striking chapter in The British Way in Warfare is a reprint of an essay that originally appeared in America in 1930 in The Yale Review.⁷⁹ Its title was "Armament and Its Future Use". It offered Liddell Hart the opportunity to evaluate the state of European armies twelve years after the Great War in light of changes in technology, and to draw a conceptual picture of the composition of armies capable of operational adroitness.

"Armament and Its Future," now retitled "The Future of Armament and Its Future Use," was an opportunity to revisit old issues. Liddell Hart began by castigating army force designers for failure to respond to the capabilities of weapons already proven in war, the machine gun, gas, the tank, and the airplane. Notwithstanding the evidence of the last war, "the bulk of most armies still consists of infantry, and faith is still pinned on the idea of their attack, although machine-guns are more

numerous than ever in proportion to number of men, while the use of gas is banned and the use of tanks is on a puny experimental scale."⁸⁰ He pointed to the vulnerability of infantry masses, to machine guns in the attack and to air interdiction on the march. Not sparing the navy he outlined the implications of airpower for merchant and fighting fleets. He outlined a progression through motorization to mechanization, not unlike that of his 'New Model' Army articles of 1922-'24, suggesting that such an evolution would have to be gradual and sequential because of a natural military reluctance to do away with old forms. He saw the transition of foot soldiers to a light infantry (the old tank marines) gradually absorbed into mechanized units. As a theorist, however, he provided that essential word-picture of land warfare that tied much of his past writing into a balanced conceptual whole.

What Liddell Hart foresaw was an army "as a whole now strategically mobile," which was to "regroup itself into two fighting parts with separate tactical functions -- one a close-fighting part, composed of semi-mechanized infantry, and the other a mobile-fighting part, composed entirely of armoured fighting vehicles."⁸¹ The former was to fix and disorganize the opponent while the latter "would carry out a decisive maneuver against his rear."⁸² To this differentiated land formation he then added airpower, "destined to be to armies as whales what mechanized forces are to infantry."⁸³

Liddell Hart wrote that, "Military organization at its several peaks in history has been based on the combination of a defensive pivot and mobile offensive wings."⁸⁴ In short, the basis of military artistry

was an arm of superior offensive power and mobility. Liddell Hart was careful to point out that the difference between the parts was relative and not absolute, pointing particularly to the Macedonian phalanx and Roman legion as sophisticated 'tactical pivots'. This choice of examples was not accidental. It emphasizes to the historically literate the dynamic roles of fixing and disorganization within the characterization of the 'defensive pivot'.

The air force occupied the same relationship to the army as mechanized forces to a motorized mass. In this, the army was the stable pivot, the air force the arm of maneuver. Within this dyad the mechanized army would move rapidly against enemy aerodromes and economic centers, disposing of any enemy forces that happened to intervene.

"These economic resources rather than the armed forces will be the real point of aim in another war," he wrote, "and the armed forces themselves only an obstacle to be overcome, if it cannot be evaded, on the way to the economic goal."⁸⁵ With the elevation of the economic target and the ease with which the air weapon could strike it directly, the distinction between civil and military targets would blur and "the infliction of military and civil damage, material and moral, will coincide."⁸⁶ In this 'economic' war, the air force would be the dominant partner seconded by navies and mechanized armies. It is important to recognize that in this treatment of airpower Liddell Hart did not distinguish as separate categories the operational use of airpower for interdiction and its strategic use against economic targets. He did recognize both functions.

What one is left with, therefore, is a set of parallel dyads, at successively higher levels of military activity, differentiated internally at all but the lowest level by their comparative mobility and hitting power, each fighting in accordance with Liddell Hart's fundamental division of guarding (fixing) and hitting. At the lowest levels, tactical units fixed with one element, quite possibly the bulk of their available force, and maneuvered another onto the enemy's rear with the primary purpose to destroy the continuity of his resistance. Exploitation, preferably by an uncommitted force, was to be immediate and relentless.

A corps-sized force was to employ its divisions in the same way. The line divisions would fix and disorganize while the armored forces struck into the enemy's rear, again with the purpose of dislocation and paralysis. One level higher, what Liddell Hart had called the 'over-land' forces, or the dyad of mechanized forces and tactical air forces, performed in the same way, the ground forces fixing and disorganizing while the tactical air forces interdicted enemy reserves and support structures. At the highest level the air forces would strike the enemy's national means to war, acting as a great maneuver arm for the entire defense structure. At each level the critical component of the dynamic was the existence of an arm capable of striking with such speed that enemy was unable to react effectively.

The final chapter pertinent to this essay was titled, "The Concentrated Essence of War". Originally published in 1930 in the R.U.S.I. Journal, it provided an encapsulation of the 'strategy of the

indirect approach'.⁸⁷ The essay would reappear in subsequent books during the thirties. It was grafted onto The Decisive Wars of History when that book was revised in the 1950s and '60s.⁸⁸

The chapter began by rejecting one sentence aphorisms as suitable statements of principles of war. Liddell Hart had always shown some discomfort with that idea and his rejection is consistent with his own experience dating as far back as 1920. What he did suggest, however, was that a study of war revealed certain axioms applicable to both strategy and tactics. These, not surprisingly, were at least the essence of The Decisive Wars of History and Sherman, if not of war in general.

There were six such axioms:

1. Choose the line ... of least expectation.
2. Exploit the line of least resistance....
3. Take a line of operation which offers alternative objectives.
4. Ensure that both plan and dispositions are elastic, or adaptable.
5. Don't lunge whilst your opponent can parry. [i.e., attack must follow dislocation.]
6. Don't renew an attack along the same line (or in the same form), after it has once failed.

He concluded: "The essential truth underlying these axioms is that, for success, two major problems must be solved -- disorganization and exploitation. One precedes and one follows the actual blow, which

in comparison is a simple act."⁸⁹ The first creates the opportunity to attack, the second reaps the reward.

The second book published during this fruitful year was a short (scarcely 55 pages of text) book titled The Future of Infantry.⁹⁰ The work had its origin as a lecture delivered to the officers of the Southern Command in the early months of 1932. As this paper has already shown, the need for an efficient infantry was a consistent theme in Liddell Hart's writings from the earliest days. In The Future of Infantry he joined his earlier arguments in by far the clearest exposition of his fundamental position on the issue. He spoke to two themes, the historical role of infantry and the means by which men-who-fight-on-foot could be restored to their proper place on the battlefield.

In summarizing the history of dismounted fighters, Liddell Hart discriminated between what he saw as a mere armed mass and disciplined forces capable of fixing and maneuver. Particular representatives of the latter were Alexander's phalanx and Scipio's legions. Frederick's army was "the last ... in which the disorganizing power of the infantry was equaled by the finishing power of the cavalry."⁹¹ Beginning with Napoleon, Liddell Hart saw a progressive deterioration of the infantry arm as concentration on massed firepower and the geometric increase in the capabilities of modern firearms led progressively to the loss of infantry's power of maneuver. This trend was reversed in 1918 by the Germans with their soft spot or infiltration tactics.

Liddell Hart drew two conclusions from his historical survey. The first was "that shock, which was always a moral more than physical effect, has been obsolete for two hundred years." The second was that "the decisiveness of battle has declined with the growing disability of cavalry."⁹² He went on to explain that it was less the striking power of the cavalry than its ability to strike quickly enough to exploit any opportunity that made the mounted arm the arm of decision. It was the role of infantry to create that opportunity.

Lower orders of infantry were tactically relevant only because they provided a stable base from which a more mobile mounted force could maneuver. True infantry, however, possessed the power to disorganize, to penetrate weak spots and menace the enemy's rear areas thereby preparing the way for a decisive attack. Whereas the first was a purely defensive function, the second was offensive and required a tactical mobility on the part of the infantry. Liddell Hart recommended two ratios of infantry to cavalry or mounted arm. Where the mounted arm was designed only for strategic effect, he believed a ratio of 1 to 4 or 5 was adequate. But, where tactical as well as strategic effect was desired, the ratio of 1 to 2 was more appropriate. That is, one brigade of tanks was required to two of infantry.⁹³

In concluding his discussion of the relationship of the two maneuver arms Liddell Hart made the observation that infantry could not replace the need for a modernized cavalry "because they cannot strike quick enough or follow through soon enough for decisiveness in battle."⁹⁴ He qualified this assertion by stating that the only

circumstance in which this was not the case was that in which the infantry were mounted in armored vehicles, acting as modern dragoons. In that case, not dissimilar from the Bradley crewmen, decisive action, as opposed to the disorganizing function, would have to be mounted.

While masses of common variety infantry could be raised in short order in wartime, Liddell Hart recommended that all regular infantry and the best Territorial units should be trained as elite light infantry, specially equipped and trained for their offensive role. All were to be motorized for strategic (operational) mobility. Some would be mechanized. Individually they were to be trained as stalkers and skirmishers. Their basic tactical technique was the 'expanding torrent' system by which the infantry groups would create opportunities for the mounted arm to exploit, through "the compound effect of many local collapses in small units."⁹⁵ These attacks would take three forms, the "stalking attack" which depended on the presence of rough or broken terrain, the "masked attack" through smoke, fog or darkness, and the "baited attack," luring the enemy into a repulse which could then be exploited. This brand of warfare required an exceptional soldier, "a stalker, athlete, and marksman."⁹⁶

"To train infantry," Liddell Hart wrote:

which is essentially the tactical arm, is to exercise an art whereas to train the technical arms is to apply a science. The infantry soldier is less a

technician, but he is a field-craftsman -- this is the title of honour to which he may aspire in the profession of arms.⁹⁷

Recognizing that implicit in the subject is a somewhat circumscribed view of the dynamics of battle, the article is remarkably reticent on the question of how the infantry formations in question were to withstand attack by an enemy's armor. It was the disciplined action of the phalanx and the pike that allowed the infantry of old to withstand the cavalry. It was the effect of fire as much or more than the hedge of bayonets that kept the charging cavalry out of the famous British squares. Liddell Hart himself had pointed out again and again in his criticism of annual maneuvers that the British Army was singularly embarrassed in the lack of effective anti-tank weapons. Yet, with regard to his light infantry, he did not address the point at all. He simply focused on the utility of the arm when performing in a single role against a not dissimilar foe. One can only speculate that the subject did not arise because antitank weapons were the purview of another arm. Still, it seems a curious omission.

The Lees Knowles Lectures have enriched the corpus of Anglo-Saxon thought on military affairs. Sir Archibald Wavell's Generals and Generalship⁹⁸ and Sir John Hackett's The Profession of Arms⁹⁹ are but two of the best known examples. Both generals were preceded on that podium by B. H. Liddell Hart who, in 1932-33, delivered that year's addresses under the title "The Movement of Military Thought from the Eighteenth to the Twentieth Century, and Its Influence on European

History." These lectures, with one additional chapter of reflections, were published in 1933 as The Ghost of Napoleon.

The sense of the "Prologue" to The Ghost of Napoleon, the author's view of the theorist as hero, has been discussed above.¹⁰⁰ This view, while not unflattering to its author, also carried grave responsibilities that endow this particular work with a special significance. Here one sees Liddell Hart, the theorist, pronouncing his judgment on his predecessors in military theory. Thereby he provides a unique view of his own theory of war.

The thrust of this survey was that modern military theory had been confined in two streams since the eighteenth century. The first, which evolved from the writings of Saxe, Bourcet, and Guibert, had been responsible for the success of Revolutionary France and Bonaparte's early campaigns. The other, of which Jomini and Clausewitz were the founders, led inevitably to the trenches of the First World War.

"Battle," Liddell Hart wrote, "implies mobility, strategic and tactical."¹⁰¹ To be successful an army must be able to move quickly against its foe. It must be able to close with the enemy in the face of his fire. And it must be able to pursue a defeated enemy. Battle also requires the immobilization of one's opponent so he cannot refuse battle or counter one's blows. In the eighteenth century, he wrote, armies were limited in their strategic mobility and their ability to fix an enemy and make him stand and fight. These were the conditions from

which Saxe, Bourcet and Guibert sought freedom through the dual virtues of dispersal and mobility.

The first modern theorist, however, was Liddell Hart's old friend Marshal de Saxe. In contrast to his assertions in "The Napoleonic Fallacy," Liddell Hart now wrote that Saxe had not argued against battle but against the disadvantageous battle. "Good generalship," Liddell Hart wrote, "should first weaken and upset the enemy...."¹⁰² What Liddell Hart admired most about Saxe, however, was his conceptual organization of an army into semi-independent subunits, in which Liddell Hart saw the precursor of the divisional system. "Through this, above all," he declared, "strategy was to be revolutionized in the Wars of Revolution and the Empire."¹⁰³

It was Pierre de Bourcet who, following Saxe, was the father of dispersal. Bourcet's most famous campaigns were as chief of staff in an army moving through the Alps into northern Italy. From his campaigns and writings, Liddell Hart drew two lessons. The first, "that calculated dispersion is often the only way to effective concentration,"¹⁰⁴ and, "Bourcet's cardinal principle ... that 'a plan ought to have several branches.'"¹⁰⁵ The first, of course, was the principle underlying Napoleon's corps system, the idea of semi-independent formations moving on a wide front but within supporting distance should any one of them strike an enemy beyond its means to dispose of. No less important was the fact that these supporting forces were to fall on the enemy's flanks and rear in concert with the engaged or fixing force, not just increase the mass by concentration. The

purpose of branches in a strategic plan or operation was to insure alternatives to the commander at each decision point should events not turn out as expected or desired. Both ideas had been raised by Liddell Hart in The Decisive Wars of History and Sherman.

Liddell Hart called Guibert the prophet of mobility. Best known today for his evocation of a national regeneration from which Napoleon seems naturally to spring,¹⁰⁶ Guibert made a lifetime study of military affairs from regimental training to national administration. He was responsible for a number of practical reform particularly with regard to how an army was equipped and supplied. His two books, Essai General de Tactique, and Defense de Systeme de Guerre Moderne, both spoke to the type of war Napoleon would soon wage on the map of Europe. In Liddell Hart's words, "Guibert had sought to lay the foundations of a more mobile army ... to make a more mobile type of warfare."¹⁰⁷ He seems to have been particularly fascinated with the possibilities of the turning movement as an operational technique. Liddell Hart's comments show the twentieth century theorist was as interested in Guibert's relish in standing against 'approved opinion' as in the fruits of his theory. He calls him a "philosopher of war" rather than a military scientist.¹⁰⁸

It was Napoleon who had the mind able to grasp the principles put forth by Bourcet and Guibert, as well "as the power and courage to apply them."¹⁰⁹ Liddell Hart compared Napoleon's campaigns against European armies to the battles between the retarius and the secutor.¹¹⁰ The Napoleonic strategic net was formed by the division (actually corps) system which permitted the dispersed movement characteristic of the

Napoleonic armies. The tactical trident was the combination of "skirmishers to pave the way for the assault", "mobile field artillery ... concentrated against the enemy's weak spots," and "the rear manoeuvre, the idea of moving the army as a grouped whole on to the enemy's rear and placing it astride his communications".¹¹¹

Unfortunately, Liddell Hart wrote, "General Bonaparte applied a theory which created an empire for him. The Emperor Napoleon developed a practice which wrecked his empire."¹¹² The Emperor's fault was that, whereas the true use of the new mobility of the French army was to concentrate "superior strength against an opponent's weak points to the end that they should become decisive points,"¹¹³ Napoleon, he wrote, used it merely to concentrate a superior mass in the face of the enemy. "The true virtue of the power of mobile concentration," Liddell Hart observed, "lay in its fluidity, [and] its variability, not its density."¹¹⁴ The distinction between the campaigns of Bonaparte and Napoleon was lost, in Liddell Hart's view, on his disciples, particularly on Jomini and Clausewitz, the one called by Liddell Hart the "Pillar of Sound Strategy," the other, the "Mahdi of Mass."

Liddell Hart's criticism of Jomini focused on two issues. The first was the Swiss theorist's definition of the fundamental principle of war. Liddell Hart believed it overemphasized the necessity and nature of concentration. What Jomini missed, in Liddell Hart's view, was the idea of successive concentration and, even more, what it is that makes a point decisive. In more general terms, and as his second point of criticism, Liddell Hart maintained that Jomini had missed the

psychological effect of Napoleon's system, the distraction caused by apparent dispersion, and the use of each division (or corps) as a floating reserve for every other division.

Jomini did give less importance to the psychological effect of Napoleon's system than did Liddell Hart. Jomini certainly recognized the importance of divided movement in the case of large armies.¹¹⁵ He also recommended the turning movement as a strategic technique.¹¹⁶ However, he warned of the dangers of concentric advances and concentration on the battlefield in the face of a foe capable of defeating the advancing fractions separately.¹¹⁷ As the battle on interior lines was one of Napoleon's most successful techniques, Jomini's views would seem to be as true to the Napoleonic experience as Liddell Hart's.

Liddell Hart's discussion of a 'decisive point' is significant because it illustrates a tendency on his part to emphasize the role of strategy as the precursor of battle to the neglect of its role as its employer. Jomini defined a "decisive strategic point" as "all those [points] which are capable of exercising a marked influence either upon the result of the campaign or upon a single enterprise."¹¹⁸ For Liddell Hart, "a point only becomes decisive when its condition permits you to gain a decision there. For this to be possible, it must be a weak point relatively to the force you bring against it. And the real art of war is to insure or create that weakness."¹¹⁹ Distraction based on mobility is the means by which this was to be done.

What Liddell Hart neglects here is the fundamental distinction between points that are locally decisive and those which produce a more general decision on the outcome of the campaign or war. The one requires only the force imbalance of which he speaks in his criticism of Jomini. The other must have, in addition, a vital significance for the continuity of the enemy effort. The 1918 German Spring Offensive demonstrated the futility of local decisions which do not produce general results. In light of his other writings, many of which point out this very issue, it would seem that, in criticizing what he perceived to be Jomini's neglect of the vital role of tactical decision in operational success, Liddell Hart neglected the equally important factor of operational significance.

But it was for Clausewitz that Liddell Hart reserved his most violent attacks. He blamed the Prussian for the doctrine of absolute war fought to the finish just as he had when Spencer Wilkinson took him to task in 1927. It was an argument based on emotion more than reason and one which reflected a very careless reading of On War. In his recent study of Liddell Hart's military thought Brian Bond wrote of The Ghost of Napoleon: "... the book can most charitably be regarded not as a work of historical scholarship but as a brilliantly written polemic in which Liddell Hart brings to a climax his long-cherished notion that Clausewitz's evil ideas ... were responsible for the negation of strategy in the First World War."¹²⁰

In the end, Liddell Hart recanted in so far as he acknowledged some of the qualifications which Clausewitz had included in his more abstract

sections. However, Liddell Hart followed one such qualification by noting:

Not one reader in a hundred was likely to follow the subtlety of his logic, or to preserve a true balance amid such philosophical jugglery.¹²¹

Everyone, Liddell Hart continued, remembered the Prussian's more extreme aphorisms. In short, the theorist was still responsible for the errors of his disciples.

Liddell Hart gave as Clausewitz's major contribution the attention given the moral sphere in war. But he asserted that it was Clausewitz's insistence on the importance of numbers that blinded the leaders of Europe's armies to the effect of technology and led to the slaughter of World War I. Clausewitz was narrowed by Foch, Liddell Hart wrote, into a doctrine in which battle became the only means of war and the 'will to conquer' the dominant tactical principle. From Foch through Henry Wilson the doctrine passed to Britain. Liddell Hart wrote that the weak point of 'the will to conquer' was shown "in August 1914, when bullets -- the hardest of facts -- proved that they could overcome the will of the stoutest commander by their effect on the bodies of his men."¹²² The corresponding lesson was that the 'will to conquer' requires "a preparatory advantage, moral, or material" and that must be provided "by surprise or weapons power."¹²³

Whatever the book's value as a historical or critical text, it does provide an excellent summary of Liddell Hart's view of war as it had evolved by 1933. At the end of the book in a section called "The Law of

Survival,"¹²⁴ Liddell Hart summarized. The law of survival, he said, was adaptability. In war policy this meant "an adjustment to post-war aims which fundamentally modifies the theory of absolute war." In strategy "an adaptation of ends and means, of aim to reality, which modifies the ideal theory of destroying the 'main armed forces' of the enemy...."¹²⁵ "The strategist," he wrote:

must acquire a deeper understanding of the principle of concentration, in its more profound sense of concentration against weakness produced by distraction. He must also acquire a new understanding of the principle of alternatives -- i.e., adaptability of objectives -- a principle which has never yet found a place in the textbooks though inherent in the very nature of war.¹²⁶

NOTES

Chapter IV

1. LtCol Michael D. Wyly in "The 'Maneuver Warfare' Concept," Marine Corps Gazette (April, 1981), 52-53.
2. B. H. Liddell Hart, The British Way in Warfare (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1933). Published in Britain in 1932 by Faber and Faber.
3. B. H. Liddell Hart, The Future of Infantry (London: Faber and Faber, Ltd., 1933).
4. B. H. Liddell Hart, The Real War, 1914-1918 (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1964). Originally published in 1930.
5. B. H. Liddell Hart, Foch: The Man of Orleans (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1932).
6. B. H. Liddell Hart, Strategy (2d ed.; Frederick A. Praeger, 1967).
7. See for example, Liddell Hart, "The Essential Principles of War," pp. 31-32.
8. Liddell Hart, Decisive Wars of History, p. 5.
9. Ibid., p. 4. The corresponding 1967 formulation is somewhat more definitive: "...effective results in war have rarely been attained unless the approach has had such indirectness as to ensure the opponent's unreadiness to meet it. The indirectness has usually been physical, and always psychological." Liddell Hart, Strategy, p. 25.
10. Liddell Hart, Decisive Wars of History, p. 156.
11. Ibid., p. vii.
12. Ibid., p. 141.
13. Ibid., p. 143.
14. Ibid., p. 144.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid., pp. 145-146.
17. Ibid., p. 145.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid., p. 6. See Baron de Jomini, The Art of War, trans. by Captain G. H. Mendell and Lieutenant W. P. Craighill (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1862), p. 62. Logistics according to Jomini was "the art of moving armies."
20. Liddell Hart, Strategy, p. 164.

21. Liddell Hart, Thoughts on War, p. 114.
22. Quoted in Liddell Hart, Decisive Wars of History, p. 147.
23. Quoted in Ibid., p. 148.
24. Ibid., p. 150.
25. Ibid.
26. United States, Department of the Army, FM 100-5 Operations (Prepublication Edition), May 1986, p. 2-1.
27. See above, page 58.
28. Liddell Hart, Decisive Wars of History, p. 153-154.
29. Ibid., pp. 151-152.
30. Ibid., p. 156.
31. Liddell Hart, "The Napoleonic Fallacy," p. 513.
32. See for example the matrix created by the U. S. Army War College for contingency planning in "Understanding Military Contingency Planning," Military Review, (July, 1981), p. 41, or the 'laundry list' for tactical success in United States, Department of the Army, FM 100-5 Operations (Prepublication Edition), May 1986, p. 3-9.
33. Liddell Hart, Strategy, p. 18.
34. Liddell Hart, Memoirs, I, 162-165.
35. Liddell Hart, The Decisive Wars of History, p. 71.
36. Brian Holden Reid, "J. F. C. Fuller's Theory of Mechanized Warfare," The Journal of Strategic Studies, I (December, 1978), 297.
37. Liddell Hart, Sherman, pp. 346, 381, 430.
38. Ibid., pp. 305-306, 290-291.
39. Ibid., p. 328. See also p. 232.
40. Ibid., p. 330. See also 205, 301.
41. Coincident with publication of Sherman Liddell Hart coined a new name for the 'luring' attack. It became the 'baited' offensive. See Liddell Hart, Thoughts on War, p. 241.
42. Liddell Hart, Sherman, pp. 98. See also 193.
43. Ibid., p. 428.

44. Ibid., p. viii.
45. Ibid., pp. 121-122.
46. Ibid., p. 188.
47. Ibid., p. 188, 253, 307.
48. Sherman's term quoted in Ibid., p. 315.
49. Ibid., p. 208.
50. Ibid., pp. 272-273.
51. Ibid., p. 243.
52. Ibid., pp. 220-221.
53. Ibid., p. 312.
54. Ibid., p. 280-281.
55. Ibid., p. 425.
56. Ibid., p. 426.
57. Ibid., p. 428.
58. Ibid., pp. 205, 426-430.
59. B. H. Liddell Hart, "Forward", in General William T. Sherman, Memoirs of General William T. Sherman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1957), pp. v-xvi.
60. Ibid., pp. xiii-xiv.
61. Ibid., pp. x, xi.
62. Liddell Hart, Memoirs, I, 226.
63. B. H. Liddell Hart, "Economic Pressure or Continental Victories," The Journal of the Royal United Service Institution, LXXVI (August, 1931), 486-510.
64. Howard, "Liddell Hart," pp. 40-41.
65. B. H. Liddell Hart, The British Way in Warfare (London: Faber and Faber, Ltd., 1932), pp. 16-17.
66. Spenser Wilkinson, Rise of General Bonaparte (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930).
67. Liddell Hart, The British Way in Warfare, p. 23.

68. Howard, "Liddell Hart," pp. 40-41. Michael Howard, The British Way in Warfare; A Reappraisal, the Fifth Neale Lecture in History (London: Johnathan Cape, 1975).

69. Liddell Hart, The British Way in Warfare, p. 36.

70. Ibid., p. 41.

71. Ibid.

72. Ibid., p. 7.

73. B. H. Liddell Hart, When Britain Goes to War; Adaptability and Mobility (London: Faber and Faber, Ltd., 1935).

74. Liddell Hart, The British Way in Warfare, p. 106.

75. See above, pp. 13, 18.

76. Liddell Hart, The British Way in Warfare, p. 114.

77. Ibid., p. 113.

78. Ibid., p. 114.

79. B. H. Liddell Hart, "Armament and Its Future Use," The Yale Review, XIX (June, 1930), 649-667.

80. Liddell Hart, The British Way in Warfare, p. 118.

81. Ibid., pp. 131-132.

82. Ibid., p. 132.

83. Ibid., p. 135.

84. Ibid.

85. Ibid., p. 137.

86. Ibid.

87. B. H. Liddell Hart, "The Essence of War," The Journal of the Royal United Service Institution, LXXV (August, 1930), 490-491.

88. Liddell Hart, Strategy, pp. 347-350. There were some editorial changes between the 1930 and 1932 editions of these axioms. The 1967 version added two additional axioms: "Adjust your end to your means" and, "Keep your object always in mind."

89. Liddell Hart, The British Way in Warfare, pp. 302-304.

90. B. H. Liddell Hart, The Future of Infantry (London: Faber and Faber, Ltd., 1933).

91. Ibid., p. 10.

92. Ibid., p. 29.

93. Ibid., p. 34.

94. Ibid. Emphasis in the original.

95. Ibid., p. 49.

96. Ibid., p. 63.

97. Ibid., p. 64.

98. General Sir Archibald Wavell, Generals and Generalship, The Lees Knowles Lectures delivered at Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1939 (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1941).

99. Lieutenant General Sir John Winthrop Hackett, The Profession of Arms, The Lees Knowles Lectures delivered at Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1962 (Fort Leavenworth, KS: United States Command and General Staff College, 1973).

100. See above page 60-61.

101. Liddell Hart, The Ghost of Napoleon, p. 22.

102. Ibid., p. 29, 31.

103. Ibid., p. 45.

104. Ibid., p. 53.

105. Ibid., p. 56, 58.

106. "But suppose there were to arise in Europe one vigorous nation, of method and genius and sound government; a people who combined simple virtues and a national militia with a fixed plan of aggrandizement; who never lost sight of system; who knew how to make war at small expense and subsist on their victories; who were not reduced to sheathing their sword by calculations of finance. We would see this people subjugating their neighbours ... as the north wind blows down the frail reed." Quoted in Lynn Montross, War Through the Ages (New York: Harper & Brothers, Ltd., 1944), p. 447.

107. Liddell Hart, The Ghost of Napoleon, pp. 80-81.

108. Ibid., p. 83.

109. Ibid., p. 98.

110. Ibid., pp. 98.

111. Ibid., pp. 98-99.

112. Ibid., p. 102.

113. Ibid., p. 103. Emphasis in original.
114. Ibid.
115. Jomini, The Art of War, p. 254, et seq.
116. Ibid., p. 63.
117. Ibid., p. 115.
118. Ibid., p. 78.
119. Liddell Hart, The Ghost of Napoleon, p. 111.
120. Bond, Liddell Hart, pp. 80-81.
121. Liddell Hart, The Ghost of Napoleon, p. 125.
122. Ibid., p. 139,
123. Ibid.
124. Ibid., p. 168-170.
125. Ibid., p. 169-170.
126. Ibid., p. 170.

CHAPTER V

Theorist for the 21st Century

His historian's instinct for truth was stronger than his soldierly instinct for unquestioning acceptance of what he was told. Necessary though the latter quality might be in practice, he felt that in theory everything must be tested by criticism, and rejected if it could not stand examination. Free thought seemed to him more important than uniformity of thought. In war a bad plan might be better than no plan, but in theory of war an untruth might be worse than uncertainty. In war the test of a plan is how it works, but in peace the test of a doctrine may simply be how it is worked. The historically minded find it difficult to believe that the mere addition of an official imprint to a book, compiled by a temporarily prevailing group of officers, makes it the absolute truth -- until the next edition comes out.

B. H. Liddell Hart

The function of the theorist is to explain. The function of the critic is to examine critically. Liddell Hart was both theorist and critic. Like all men, he was a man of his own time. As he sought to explain the phenomenon of war and to examine critically the military's response to its rapidly changing circumstances, he did so in the context of his own experience and his own time. As a journalist, he could observe developments in the technological base of war. To transcend his time-bound frame of reference, he tested his ideas against the larger framework of history. It is not unimportant that this comparison was sometimes superficial, as was his criticism of Clausewitz. Still, one must not lose sight of the fact that the phenomenon with which Liddell Hart dealt was immanently practical. For that reason, flawed examples do not ipso facto condemn the point in whose support they are employed, anymore than blaming Clausewitz for an error not of his making condemns either Clausewitz or the truth of the matter in question. What these examples may do is demonstrate the possible rather than the imperative.

The first test of theoretical adequacy is internal coherence. Liddell Hart found such coherence for his theory in the same place as the Prussian philosopher so often the target of his criticism, the concept of balanced ends and means. This discovery came to Liddell Hart in two stages. Early in his career as a theorist, he established the primacy of the law of economy of force. But this law is meaningless unless there is a standard by which expenditure may be measured. That, in turn, demanded that what began as a tactical inquiry, be set in the framework of war as a whole. This led inevitably to the essential idea of "The Napoleonic Fallacy," that the end of war is a more satisfactory peace. Given this as the ultimate end, the theorist could develop the telescopic structure of war within that essential unity.

Liddell Hart began his inquiries in military affairs seeking a more efficient method of breaking through an enemy defensive belt. He recognized that the effect of modern weapons was to open up the battlefield in breadth and to extend it in depth. To penetrate this zone he articulated the idea of the 'Expanding Torrent' and its defensive counterpart, the 'Contracting Funnel'. This solution was a qualitative improvement, but it was not an answer. That came with a protected means to move through the battle zone rapidly, before the defender could bring up sufficient reinforcements to plug the penetration. This means, Liddell Hart recognized, was the tank. Shortly after this discovery, the theorist turned journalist drew the tactical thread into the strategic cloth of "The Napoleonic Fallacy," and, in so doing, placed 'over-land' warfare within the greater context

of war-policy. In seeking economy of force in that sphere, Liddell Hart reasoned the target must become the enemy nation's will rather than the bodies of his troops, the moral target rather than the physical. To this end strategic bombardment to disrupt the normal pattern of life seemed to be the answer. The modern land army also had a moral center in the will of its commander and, to some extent, its soldiers. This was to be found in the enemy rear, in his command and control centers and on his communications.

From Fuller and the other armored enthusiasts Liddell Hart adopted the ideas of the massed armored formation as the cavalry of modern war, and the superior mobility of the tank as the vital characteristic of the mobile shock arm, the means to reintroduce surprise into the dynamics of battle and speed in exploitation. The capability for greater speed, and the increased combat effectiveness of the tank, appeared to Liddell Hart to be the means by which Britain could escape the toils of the conscript army.

The vital thread which runs throughout Liddell Hart's early writings is the benefit to be gained from disruption. Disruption was the means by which the 'Expanding Torrent' achieved the collapse of a section of the enemy's defensive zone. It was the object on a larger scale of the attack by the armored force. At the national level it was the goal of strategic air bombardment. As the armored force filled the conceptual position of the mounted arm of old, Liddell Hart drew his tactical and operational ideas together under the umbrella concept of the 'indirect approach', the unifying proposition that disruption must

precede destruction. His study of Sherman convinced him that disruption was best achieved through the defensive-offensive, or 'luring' attack. Offensively it was achieved by the turning movement or the advance on a broad front against multiple objectives, seeking to ensnare the enemy in a net of semi-independent but mutually supporting columns. The object of these techniques, and of strategy in general, was to minimize or obviate the need for fighting. Liddell Hart carried this desire for indirectness in attacking the moral objective to his call for adoption of the 'British way' of warfare.

Finally Liddell Hart presented a unified and dynamic view of war as the combination at all levels of a fixing and a maneuver arm, the latter, in most cases, of superior mobility to the mass of one's own and one's enemy's forces. The function of the maneuver arm was the exploitation of the fleeting opportunity. This conceptual model of simultaneously acting echelons, directed to achieve collectively a common political end, was the distillation of his early inquiries, the model at the strategic level which corresponded to 'The Man-in-the-Dark' at the tactical.

Liddell Hart continued to develop his perspective of mechanized warfare throughout the thirties. While he has been criticized for his arguments in favor of the policy of "Limited Liability" (minimal military support for France in case of a continental war), a close look at his depiction of the then future war was surprisingly accurate at the tactical and operational level, and most consistent with what he had written prior to 1933. In a 1937 article written for The Times, he

described the attack on a prepared defense in terms which Colonel John Boyd would find congenial. He argued for adoption at the strategic level of the 'Expanding Torrent' technique. He wrote that:

The key to success ... lies in rapidity of leverage, progressively extended deeper -- in demoralizing the opposition by creating successive flank threats quicker than the enemy can meet them, so that his resistance, as a whole or in parts, is loosened by the fear of being cut off.²

Liddell Hart did believe that experience demonstrated the defensive form had benefited most from new technologies in those cases where opponents possessed similar equipment. He argued that, as a result "The most effective strategy is thus to have or induce the opponent to throw himself against one's own defence, and then, when he is shaken by the abortive effort, to deliver a riposte before he can assume a defensive attitude and to press the riposte home."³ The argument was in support of the 'luring' attack and the emphasis on pressing the riposte home was designed to impress the reader with the force-oriented nature of the defensive. Liddell Hart too believed in the superiority of the "slashing sword of vengeance".

Liddell Hart's tactical and operational views were generally congruent with the experience of the Second World War in so far as the conduct of operations was concerned. It did take a good deal more killing than one might have expected to consolidate the areas cut off by armored spearheads, indicating that psychological dislocation may be harder to achieve than Liddell Hart anticipated. The continued popularity of his book, Strategy, would seem to indicate that, in spite

of its periodic historical oversimplification and questionable criticism of Clausewitz, the conceptual framework continues to serve the function of furthering understanding about war. In short, Liddell Hart's theory of war would seem to meet the test of adequacy.

Today, however, the real question is that of relevance. Are we simply falling into the old trap of preparing for the last war when we turn to Liddell Hart's fifty year old writings to understand the next war? Certainly the conditions have changed. The fear of mutual suicide makes doubtful the idea of engaging in any kind of overt strategic warfare against the heart of the enemy's country, unless one has achieved a technological breakthrough that promises a successful first strike, or in the event one's own existence is threatened. That fact gives the operational level of war even greater prominence. The political goals of NATO will very likely have to be gained at the operational level, if deterrence fails and war comes to Europe.

Conditions of war have also changed at the tactical and operational level since the end of the last war. On the one hand, trends noted by Liddell Hart and his contemporaries, increasing lethality and dispersion of forces, have continued apace. At the same time, the differential mobility essential to the success of the tank, as a means of exploitation or mobile defense in the last war, may or may not remain as all armies in Europe have become fully mechanized. Both sides have also gone some way in providing their infantry with modern counter-systems, the successors to the long bow and pike, with which to fend off the more mobile forces, tanks and planes. The attack helicopter contends for the

role of the light tank of tomorrow. Commanders are deluged by information about their own forces and the enemy's.

For all that conditions have changed, however, the problem remains the same. The alliance finds itself generally outnumbered, so it will have to appeal to art to compensate for numbers. If, as Liddell Hart wrote, art inevitably depends on relative speed and effectiveness of execution, whether gained through technology, like the World War II tank, or reorganization of forces, like Sherman's army, or perhaps better methods of command and control, then his theory provides a starting point for the development of forces, structure, and procedures for future wars as well as the analysis of those past.

There is one other point which must be considered as well. Theorists are all disciplined observers of phenomena. In the case of the phenomenon of war, what differentiates one theorist from another is his perspective of time, place, or background, and his gift for explanation of what he observes. Theorists who look at the same phenomenon tend to develop points of similarity. Just as Wilkinson pointed to Liddell Hart's similarity to Clausewitz (notwithstanding Liddell Hart's presumed disagreement with that assessment), Liddell Hart anticipated contemporary 'maneuver warfare' theorists. It is in their collective view that theorists approach reality. Students may disagree whether it is "the extent to which [the theorist's] thought correlates with reality," or "the scope and reach of their thought" which marks some few as great.⁴ The pragmatist will argue for the first as the only thought which has 'practical' utility. Yet the second stretches

the imagination and intellect of the student who follows. Whatever the flaws when judged by the standard of the former, Liddell Hart is undeniably great by the standard of the latter. For that reason too, Liddell Hart remains a theorist for the 21st Century.

NOTES

Chapter V

1. Liddell Hart, The British Way in Warfare, pp. 52-53

2. (B. H. Liddell Hart), "The Attack in Warfare; Changing Tactics -- Modern Conditions of Success," The Times (London) (10 September, 1937), 13. Emphasis added.

3. Ibid., p. 14. Liddell Hart commented on terrain oriented defenses: "In most cases it is a reflection on the defensive dispositions if any point is so important that it must be regained and cannot be regarded as well sold for the price that the attacker has had to pay for it."

4. Professor James J. Schneider, Professor of Military Theory, School of Advanced Military Studies, in note to author.

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